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# MARJORY MAXWELL,

## The Major's Daughter.

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BROTHER AND SISTER —*p.* 13. *Frontispiece.*

# MARJORY MAXWELL,

## The Major's Daughter.

BY

IDA JACKSON

AUTHOR OF "MARIANNE LINLEY'S SACRIFICE," ETC.

EDINBURGH

DAVID M. SMALL, 3 HOWARD STREET

1898

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# MARJORY MAXWELL,

## The Major's Daughter.

## CHAPTER I.

### BROTHER AND SISTER.

"HILDA! Hilda! I have accomplished a feat this morning; if you wish to hear what it is, leave the scones to take care of themselves, and come out for a breath of air," exclaimed Tom Oxlade, as he entered the kitchen of Denetap Farm, where his sister, the presiding genius of the farm, was busy baking.

Tom was a divinity student, attending Edinburgh University, and had arrived home on the previous day for a short holiday.

"Very much do I want to know what you've been about, Tom, but I can't leave my scones. No, not for a single second, sir!" replied Hilda, laughing, as she caught sight of the grimaces on her brother's face, and realised that he really had something to tell worthy of her attention.

"Scones *versus* information then, Hilda!" answered Tom, advancing towards the girdle and helping himself to one of the best fired, round, dainty morsels, which, when sufficiently cool, he began to eat with evident appreciation.

"Well, my captious critic, is it up to the mark? I think they look delicious, but, you know, self-praise is not always reliable."

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it! Yes, you have turned out a famous baker at last, Hilda; pity but what you could transport yourself and your girdle to Auld Reekie now and again during the session. Why did you leave it behind that time you came to stay with me?" rejoined the young divinity, helping himself to another scone as he spoke.

"That's a broad hint for a box to be sent you a little oftener than formerly, Tom," laughed Hilda, ignoring all reference to her visit to the metropolis, which was somewhat of a standing joke in the family.

"Well, if you look at it in that sensible manner, I'm sure I won't contradict you. Your scones disappear like snow off a dyke when they come to my digs. Now, that's the last compliment I'm inclined to pay you, Hilda."

"Next session's a long way a-head yet, so I'd better not be too profuse in my promises. But now, tell me what you've been about; Andrew saw you toiling manfully up the hill as if bound for the loch. Is that where you've been?" asked Hilda, coming over to her well-freighted girdle and carefully turning its contents.

Seating himself in the cosy arm-chair, Tom gave one long, shrill whistle ere he answered, smiling, "Yes, I walked to the old loch, and just looked in at Earlsgrange for a few minutes, so you see I've made the acquaintance of your neighbours without much loss of time."

"Nonsense, Tom, you're joking!"

"Not at all; I have seen the Major, and also his wife and daughter."

"But you were not in the house?"

"I was in the house, and an old tumble-down place it is. I'd rather be sitting here watching that blessed girdle of yours than be condemned to sit in the best room it has. I can't understand what in the world induced the people to take it without first getting it made habitable—if not comfortable."

"They got it very cheap; the Major, I have heard, is rather hard up, but it's a fine old house, Tom, though, perhaps, sadly in want of improvements."

"It struck me as remarkably dismal-looking and in want of a thorough overhauling!"

"But you've not told me how in the world you got there? I can't understand it."

"A pair of stout legs carried me thither, whilst my sedate, clerical appearance may possibly have induced the occupants to treat me with the frankness they did; pray don't give way to jealousy, Hilda."

"Don't tease, Tom, but tell me how you made the acquaintance of the Earlsgrange people, when

no one hereabouts seems ever to have crossed their threshold?"

"I have already hinted at the probable explanation; won't it suffice?"

"Scarcely, sir! Now, I'm all attention, so out with the list of adventures which landed you where they did," laughed Hilda, as, clearing her girdle, she approached as near her brother's chair as was consistent with safety, her flour-covered hands being taken into consideration.

"All right then, Hilda, I'll spin my yarn, now that these precious scones are out of the way; and, to begin at the beginning—as Aunt Kirsten was wont to approve of—I, finding none of you had time to devote to me, set off after breakfast for the loch, and, whilst quietly sauntering by its shores, I observed two ladies resting on the jutting-out dyke which runs from the head of the field by the plantation right into the water. I quite escaped their notice, and I soon found, from the younger one's occupation, that they supposed they had the place to themselves. Miss Maxwell—for it was she—had taken off her boots, and was, in true nymph-like fashion, sitting as far out on the dyke as she could get, enjoying the luxury of splashing her little feet about in the water."

"Not wishing to intrude on the young lady's amusement, I modestly began to retrace my steps, when a scream broke on my ear, and turning, I saw the girl so convulsed with laughter as to be perfectly powerless to aid the elder lady in her efforts to arrest the progress of a certain black

speck in the water, which she seemed anxious to bring to shore. The black speck turned out to be nothing less valuable than one of Miss Maxwell's boots, which had for some little time been quietly drifting away, until, when noticed, it was completely out of reach. With one shoe on and one shoe off, the girl stood laughing loudly at her mother's attempts to strike the offending boot with pieces of wood and stones she kept vigorously throwing. Her attempts to bring it back were, however, altogether in vain, for, bent upon seeing something of the world beyond Earlsgrange, the boot sailed rapidly, gracefully away; and by the time I reached the spot, both ladies assured me it was useless to waste further efforts upon the hopeless task."

"Well, and what did you do?" asked Hilda, as her brother paused for a comment upon the situation.

"I did my best to keep a sober face, but it was no easy task. With Mrs. Maxwell, grave as a judge, reflecting upon her own carelessness in permitting her daughter to indulge in so childish a pastime, and the bootless maiden schooling herself to appear the culprit she was far from feeling, I had difficulty enough to maintain a sympathetic gravity. Upon learning who the ladies were, I offered to fetch a pair of boots from Earlsgrange; but this proposal, meeting with Mrs. Maxwell's disapproval, I then suggested the only other alternative I could think of, which was that I should accompany them and do my utmost to render the rough places smooth for the light-hearted damsel

whose calamity seemed to strike her as nothing worse than a capital joke."

"The poor girl must have hurt her foot terribly, Tom, the road is so rough; it was a most unfortunate accident," said Hilda, sympathetically.

"Well, I really don't think she minded it at all. She 's a regular little brick, and by dint of keeping to the fields we managed tolerably. Certain it is that between her mother's aid and that of your humble servant, we landed her safe and sound—and let us hope, wiser—in the paternal hall," rejoined Tom, laughing.

"And what do you think of them?" queried Hilda with true feminine curiosity; "they are a mystery to everyone at Selsdene."

"I think Mrs. Maxwell a very pleasant, agreeable woman, though perhaps a trifle stand-offish."

"And Miss Maxwell?"

"Oh, the bootless maiden is a frank, good-natured girl of about fifteen or sixteen, not remarkably pretty, but with a bright, intelligent, small-featured face, merry blue eyes, and a plentiful crop of wavy brown hair."

"And her father?"

"My opinion of the Major completes the recital of my morning's occupations. I like him less than I do his womankind, but that may be partly due to my having detected, through all his courteously expressed thanks, an eagerness for my departure which I did not quite relish. So anxious was he to see me off the premises that he informed me he was bound for a stroll, and would accompany me

down the hill; we accordingly walked together until we reached the young plantation, when he bade me 'Good-bye.' Does father like him? you say they speak occasionally."

"He is always very frank," replied Hilda, musingly. "But, to be sure, the topics discussed are generally the weather and the crops."

"Very safe subject the weather always is when one wishes to avoid an intimacy! By-the-by, has the Major only one of a family?"

"No, there's a son, but as he has never been seen it is supposed he is engaged in business of some kind or other."

"Probably; well, I've broken the ice anyhow, thanks to Miss Maxwell's fancy for cooling her pretty little feet!" laughingly exclaimed the minister in embryo, and just then his father entered the kitchen for a second.

"Are you helping Hilda with the scones, lad?" asked Mr. Oxlade, eyeing with considerable satisfaction the tall, manly young fellow, whom neither education nor absence could wean from his inborn love of kindred and home.

"I daresay she'll tell you I've been diminishing them, at least; Hilda keeps well up to the mark, dad!"

"Yes, but she'll not be able to please you after the taste of Edinburgh fancies you've had; eh, Tom?"

"I never get a scone worth eating unless it comes from Denetap; full well you know that, dad!" rejoined Tom.

"That's strong praise for Hilda, lad, though I'm inclined to think you're spreading the butter a little too thick. But what keeps you in the house this fine warm day. You must take Hilda for a walk after dinner. It's not often she gets one with her clerical brother. Take her to the loch, Tom, and give her a sight of the moors and the hills; she deserves a treat after making all these fine-looking scones!"

"To be sure I will; but first I'm going to take a round or two with you, if you have nothing better on hand," replied Tom, rising to accompany his father, and curious to hear something more of the new tenants of Earlsgrange.

## CHAPTER II.

### DENETAP FARM.

ABOUT fifteen years prior to the opening of my tale, Mr. Oxlade's lease of his Northumberland farm having expired, he removed to his present farm, situated some three miles from the mining village of Selsdene, in the county of ——, Scotland. The domestic economies of his wifeless household he had entrusted to the wise and capable management of his sister, while he manfully toiled to make the best out of the farm he had somewhat hastily leased, and to bring up respectably and honestly the three children he had besought and coaxed his sister to accompany, and to 'mother' as long as she should continue unmarried.

Aunt Kirsten did not require much persuasion to resign the post of housekeeper she held, and transplant herself to the bereaved household she believed had the first claim upon her services.

The contrast from the snug, cosy farm of Riglands, where Mr. Oxlade had spent the first happy years of married life, to the lonely outlying one of Dene-

tap, was something of a rude awakening to the youthful, good-natured Aunt, who during the years of her residence in it could never quite forget the chill feeling of despair which had swept over her at sight of the eerie-looking farm she had agreed to make her home.

Notwithstanding this, however, neither Aunt Kirsten nor her nephews and niece experienced much, if any, unhappiness at Denetap. The passing stranger might comment upon its secluded situation, but the children grew up to love the freedom that very seclusion obtained for them; and, too young to contrast it unfavourably with the greater fertility of their former home, were quite happy at being allowed to wander unchidden and alone wherever they chose.

Far removed from the din and turmoil of a gayer world, the young folks seemed enclosed by Nature's hand in order to drink deep of the rural loveliness they never failed to find around them. To them there was no solitude in wandering by the rich gorse-scented paths which took them by a nearer cut than the circuitous highroad to school at Selsdene; in watching the changing lights and shadows flit across the heather-clad moors, or in lying for hours upon some grassy knoll listening to the joyous music of the woodland choir, and noting with wondrous accuracy the different voices of their favourites. During the long summer holiday this last was a never-failing source of amusement, and for one of the trio to have mistaken the clear shrill note of the lark for that of the blackbird, the warb-

ling of the wren for the dulcet, richer song of the thrush, the melancholy trill of the robin for that of the bonnie wee lintie, was ever regarded as a heinous transgression, and one the offender was not readily allowed to forget.

The earthly paradise in which the children revelled proved, however, a bleak and lonely existence for the indefatigable Aunt Kirsten, who, while the young people were at school, or during their many outings on the moor, was left the solitary occupant of the silent house. Mr. Oxlade, quietly observant of all that transpired under his roof, was perfectly satisfied with his sister's management. The children were cared for as well as children deprived of a mother's care could possibly be, and they, unconscious of the grief their father ever carried with him, were as happy as the day was long. If occasionally a scarcity of money made itself felt, certain it was that no housewife could economise so effectually, and withal so good naturedly, as did the willing sister, who, mindful of her brother's early-nipped happiness, toiled late and early to make his wifeless, motherless home as bright and cheerful as only a woman's kindly presence could make it.

It was to her aunt that Hilda, in the fulness of time, became indebted for her knowledge of the domestic matters in which she excelled. It was she who constantly impressed upon her niece the necessity of thoroughly equipping herself for the position she was by-and-by to occupy, of housekeeper in her father's home, and who would not

rest satisfied until she became almost as efficient as herself in butter-making, baking, sweeping and dusting, with all the many minor duties of a housewife's office. And then, when the pretty, fair-haired Hilda was sixteen, and Andrew was proving his father's right hand on the farm, and Tom had become a student of divinity in Edinburgh, Aunt Kirsten left Denetap to become the wife of Sandy Lumsden, a neighbouring farmer, who had wooed and waited impatiently until his bride considered Hilda to be old enough, and wise enough too, to fill the post her marriage would of necessity render vacant.

Hilda, as it proved, turned out an excellent housewife; and, fully conscious of the importance of her position, she not infrequently astonished her father and brothers by the indomitable energy and perseverance with which she entered upon Aunt Kirsten's labours. The monotonous round of her duties, broken only by the Sunday's church-going, the weekly visit to market, with an occasional friendly tea-drinking at one or other of the distant neighbours' houses, was so much the common lot of the rural class to which she belonged that the girl never considered the life she led other than compatible with a fairly proportionate amount of happiness and enjoyment, and one her ignorance of any other rendered completely satisfactory.

Whilst the life of a farmer had captivated the fancy of Mr. Oxlade's elder son, it had not predisposed his younger in its favour. To enter the Church had long been the goal of Tom's desires. And, knowing full well how the rigidly-practised

economy at Denetap could ill bear the further tax of his University education, he had bravely strained every effort to eke out the slender home remittances by engaging in the 'coaching' which, after the second year of his college career, enabled him to subsist without further aid from his father, and at the same time gave him the modest joy of being self-supporting. That the time devoted to tutoring, though necessarily curtailing his own hours of study, did not materially affect the internal energy with which he was endowed was fully exemplified by his gaining one of the many bursaries, which in those days of keen competition serve as keys to open the gates of learning to the penniless yet diligent student.

Tom's abilities and well-merited rewards were a never-failing source of rejoicing at Denetap; and Mr. Oxlade might well be forgiven, if occasionally, lapsing from his usual grave taciturnity, he indulged in a little self-laudation at having attained the gratifying position of father to one of the leading prizemen of the Divinity Hall.

His younger son's visits home, depending, as they began to do, on the resident tutorial engagements he might secure for the vacations, were red-letter days to the quiet stay-at-homes, who did their best to spoil him during the short periods of relaxation, which, Tom constantly affirmed, sent him back invigorated and strengthened for the work of the session.

The present visit was, to Hilda's chagrin, to be but a flying one. Engaged to read with a

gentleman's son during his prolonged stay in the Highlands, Tom had but snatched a couple of weeks ere joining his pupil at his Edinburgh home, and proceeding with him to the quiet rooms secured for them at Fort-William.

His charge was the only son of a wealthy father, and Tom was instructed to spare neither money nor patience in his efforts to wean him from the love of idleness and indifference to study, which had hitherto prevented his passing the necessary examination for matriculation at Oxford. Work seasoned with a goodly amount of amusement would, Mr. Warwick smilingly explained, be absolutely needful at the outset of the co-partnership, in order to impress his son favourably with the plan of pursuing a course of reading during the vacation. Tom's youth, buoyancy of health and spirits, coupled with the high proofs he had given of his intellectual fitness for the post, led Mr. Warwick to believe that he, instead of an older companion, would be more likely to gain his son's goodwill; and no secret was made that the ultimate success of the reading tour depended upon securing this.

To have gained the approval of so munificent a patron, fired Tom with enthusiasm to carry out his instructions to the letter; and, congratulating himself upon the good luck which had fallen to his lot, he looked forward without regret to leaving Denetap the following week, and to beginning the duties of his engagement.

## CHAPTER III.

### AT THE LOCH-SIDE.

HILDA'S after-dinner walk to the scene of her brother's *rencontre* with her new neighbours was as enjoyable as her father predicted it would be.

With a scrupulosity begotten of a timely dread of the occasional tramp, who, at odd and unlooked-for seasons, was certain to be on the alert, she fastened the front door; and then, passing through the kitchen, took the same precaution with the back one, withdrawing the key as she locked it on the outside, and placing it under the mat lying on the flagstone.

"A time-honoured custom that, Hilda; but is no one to get in until we return?" laughed Tom from the stable door on the opposite side of the court.

"Only those who are in my secret. Maryanne knows where to find the key, and I should say she would be back from Selsdene in about an hour now. As for father and Andrew, they, like yourself, remember 'the time-honoured custom,' as you call

it; should they want in they will find a way of entering, so come, let us be off," rejoined Hilda, patting, as she spoke, a wise, gentle-looking collie which bounded to her side, and manifested every intention of accompanying her in her walk.

"No, oh no, Laddie! you may come only to the end of the court, not a step farther! You know you must keep watch whilst we are gone," she whispered to her canine friend, who, obedient, yet none the less disappointed, stood perfectly still as soon as he reached the boundary line indicated by his mistress.

"A truly biddable, loyal subject you have in Laddie, Hilda. Why, I declare the old boy already begins to feel the importance of his charge, he looks as consequential as if he alone were responsible for the safety of the garrison," said Tom, as holding the yard gate open, he allowed his sister to pass through, and watched to see if Laddie meant to grasp the freedom within his reach, or go back as directed.

"Laddie is a dog with a conscience, you see, Tom!" answered Hilda, well pleased to note that whilst her favourite showed no indication of disobeying her, he yet expressively showed his sorrow at being left behind.

"So it seems! Well, ta-ta, old man! Keep a clear conscience until we come back, that's the one occupation that will ensure you a sound night's rest, believe me, Laddie!" shouted Tom, closing the gate and following his sister up the hilly path which led to the loch.

For a short distance fields of fast ripening grain were the boundary on either side; later, a young plantation, rich in the luxuriance of its summer foliage, skirted the roadway, whilst beyond, the heather-clad moor lay in all its wild and rugged beauty. The sky was dappled by numerous fleecy cloudlets flitting rapidly in eager, ceaseless unrest, the air redolent of wild flowers, the taller of which, and the showy scarlet poppies, nodded response to the whispering westerly breeze which tempered the hot July day.

Light of foot as of heart, the brother and sister briskly pursued the well-known road, until, deviating from its course, they crossed a stile and followed a tiny path which led by a near cut to the loch. As they reached its shores they found they were not the only admirers of the quiet beauty of the scene. Since Tom's visit of the morning, a gipsy camp had been pitched at a short distance from the roadside, by which a meek-looking brown horse was busily grazing. Several swarthy children were amusing themselves by casting pebbles into the water; an aged sibyl was resting her shrunken frame upon the greensward, quietly enjoying her pipe of peace; whilst every now and again a tall, handsome young man emerged from the tent, and, taking evident glances of satisfaction at the site he had chosen and its surroundings, returned again within the canvas, from which occasionally a loud guffaw was heard by the interested spectators who stood eagerly watching the merry gambols of the children.

"Summer visitors in earnest, Hilda! I daresay, too, they are as happy as some more consequential ones," said Tom gaily.

The sound of the unexpected voice attracted the attention of the drowsy sibyl, who, hastily rising to her feet, courteously smiled her welcome, and with many bows invited both 'to have their fortunes told.'

"Oh, no, thank you, we are merely taking a walk, we have not come for our fortunes; indeed, we did not know you were here," Hilda answered hesitatingly.

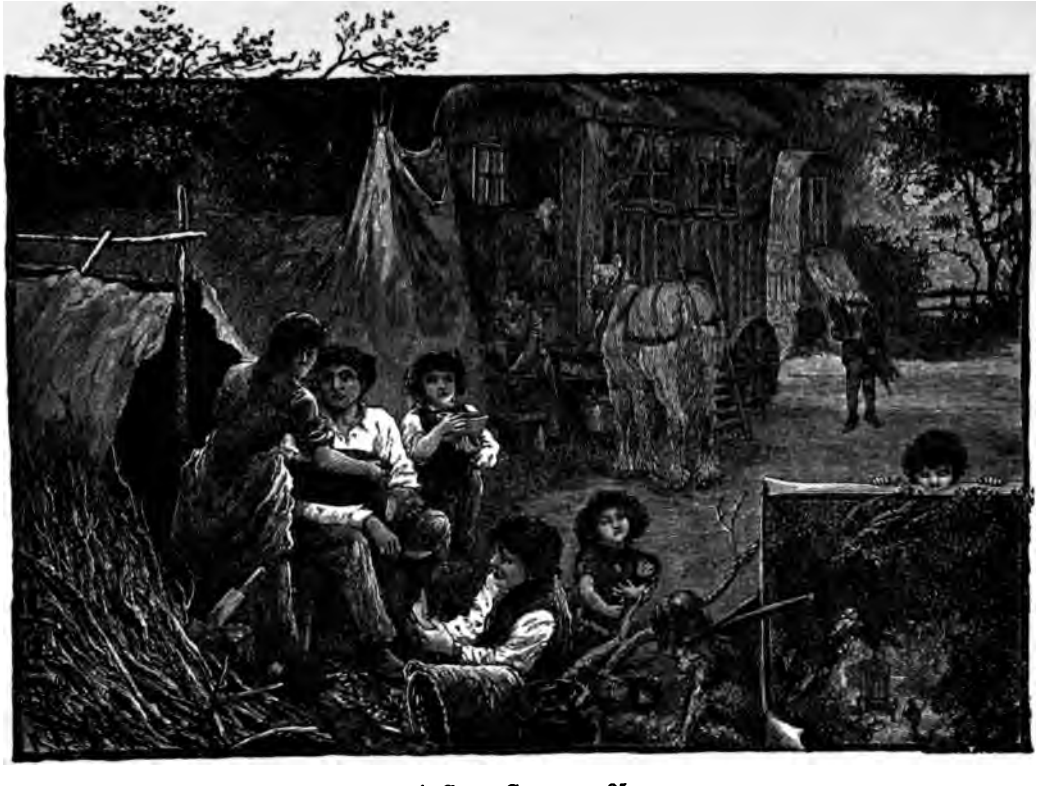
"And a very pretty place it is for a walk, honey; and though you did not think to meet me here, still you'll let the old gipsy wife spae your fortune. You'll let her do that, my dearie!"

"You have chosen good camping ground; have you travelled far?" asked Tom, wishing to change the subject.

"A long, weary road, sir, which has tired my frail old body; but for all that I'm willing and able to tell you what the future has in store for you. Your sister there thinks there's not your equal to be found in the three kingdoms. Would you not like to know if some other body is of the same opinion? Come, sir, do let me see your hand."

"How do you know that is not my sweetheart? You should be cautious," laughed Tom.

"I have lived too long in the world to make a mistake like that, sir. She is your sister, and the only one you've got, to boot!"



A Gipsy Camp.—*p.* 25.

"Are you quite sure, now?"

"Come, sir, give me a little of what you have to spare; the bonnie young leddy will just go a step in front to be out of hearing, and I'll tell you what's before you," replied the old woman, anxious to begin her trade without further loss of time.

"Well, Mother Wisdom, will this talismanic coin buy me the knowledge of which you boast?" laughed Tom, as he forthwith gave her the coveted silver, and whispered to Hilda to close her ears.

"Our knowledge is well worth the price we ask for it, sir," answered the gipsy smilingly, as she curiously inspected the lines on her listener's hand.

"You are young; you are well cared for," she continued after a second's pause; "the shadow which brought darkness and sorrow to others was not allowed to damp the joy of your happy childhood. You have reached manhood, and you are in ignorance that such existed: Search not into the secrets of others. Throughout your life you will possess the love of one you have already met, you will have her love, mark me, but whether or not she will ever become your wife is doubtful. The stars do not disclose any certainty of it," said the sibyl, dropping Tom's hand as she ceased to speak, and gazing steadily into his bright, handsome face.

"And is that all, mother?"

"Not all, my son; but would you have more, another coin must cross the palm," replied the wise one, hopeful of still further increasing her gains.

"Ah, the silver coins are too scarce a commodity for that! But why do you give me no hope of

winning my lady fair? That is a cruel fortune, surely."

"Not altogether do I deprive you of hope, but her barque will need careful steering to bring it into its desired haven. It may be she will yet be yours."

"Ah, well, Mother Wise, since you deal only in 'maybes' we must just hope for the best. Meanwhile, though, we must be going, so farewell, and a pleasant sojourn may you have by the loch-side."

"Stay, the bonnie young leddy must have her fortune told. She is the one to bring joy to somebody's hearthstone! Nay, honey, don't blush, but show me your hand, like a dear; and just step a bit away till I get a word with her myself, sir, if you please," insisted the gipsy, carefully scanning Hilda's palm, and quietly pocketing her gains.

"Yes, honey, you've been born under a lucky star. The troubles which cast their shadow upon your cradle were not allowed to rest upon it. Your future will be unclouded, save for the anxiety you may feel for those you are related to. A lover is in store for you who will prove worthy of your hand, and your barque, launched in quiet untroubled waters, will bear you tranquilly onwards until it anchors in its haven of rest," repeated the old woman with parrot-like glibness; and, with an air of satisfaction at having safely got through her task, she stood blandly smiling, waiting to hear any comments upon her fluently delivered speech.

"And how do you know all that?" asked the blushing Hilda, well-pleased to have the ordeal over.

"Ah, honey, our knowledge comes from the stars,

and I, the seventh daughter, inherit gifts above my sisters. Many long years did I spend in the study of the signs ere I became as wise as I am, dearie," answered the sibyl, shaking her head as if to impress upon her listener that wisdom in abundance dwelt under the antique crimson kerchief she wore.

"Do the events foretold prove satisfactory, Hilda?" asked Tom, drawing near after a fruitless endeavour to engage in conversation with the swarthy mites at the water's edge.

"She's been born under a lucky star, sir," replied the gipsy ere Hilda had time to speak.

"And that prognosticates riches, power, and glory in the dim uncertain future, Mother Wise?"

"It means peace and plenty, a cosy hearth and a loving mate, but neither wealth nor yet the evils which so often follow in its train," rejoined the old woman gravely.

"You are a philosopher as well as a fortune-teller, I see, mother. But now we must bid you good-bye, and leave you our best wishes for a rich harvest, though, perhaps, I should not do that either, as I do not approve of your calling. Still, as your philosophy is not half bad, I'll stretch the point, and, in any case, we both wish you well," said Tom, with a kindliness in his voice and manner which so touched the heart of the ancient sibyl that it caused her to relent a little regarding the mythical lady of his fortune.

"I wish, with all my heart, sir, that you may win her; never give up hope, and whiles mind the old gipsy wife in your prayers," she said with

one of her most humble curtseys, and a broad smile upon her withered face.

"Yes, I'll do that, mother, gladly, though I can't help wishing you had a better trade," replied Tom, shaking hands with the worthy, and leaving her to resume her meditative pipe.

"This is a new experience for me, at least, Hilda!" he said after a pause.

"And for me, also. I'm glad we came, though, had we known, perhaps we would have shunned the spot," replied Hilda musingly.

"I daresay the other inmates of the tent would have been at the business too, had they not been busily arranging their household gods. I caught sight of an extremely pretty woman, the mother of those children probably."

"It's a queer mode of living, though rather a nice way of seeing the country. I know I'd rather travel night and day in that caravan they have, than be pent up in a shop as some girls are, or even live to grow pale in some fine town house, where, instead of my moors, I'd have my neighbours' chimneys to admire," said Hilda gaily.

"I see you are thinking of your memorable visit to Edinburgh! Well, to speak the truth, I never in my life was so glad to get quit of a visitor as I was of you! Dear me! how you moped; from morning till night you did nothing but sigh for a sight of green fields! During the week you spent in my comfortable digs, I assure you I only saw you smile once, and that was when, having reached the top of Arthur's Seat, you coolly informed me you

could breathe more freely there than in the town! In your love of the country you resemble the gods, Hilda, who, in yielding up the cities for the dwelling places of profane mortals, took very good care to reserve mountains and streams, hills and valleys as their own peculiar haunts."

"I fear I did behave badly, Tom; but, do you know that each time I got to the top of that awful stair of yours, I felt as if I were imprisoned for life. And then, the outlook! nothing but chimney-stalks and dull, dirty-looking windows!"

"Treason, Hilda! Window cleaning in the city is rather a different process from that pursued at Denetap. I assure you I was very comfortable and content, very much so indeed, in my exalted airy abode."

"Oh, Tom, I was stifled by the want of air! When on several occasions you left me alone, I used to throw up the window and stretch my body over it as far as I possibly could, and all to try to get what I failed to find, one single breath of pure, fresh, uncontaminated air."

"And you confess you were miserable?"

"You were very kind; but, yes, I think I was, Tom."

"Well, I shall have to be more sparing of my invitations in future, I see!"

"I'm not going to visit you again until you are settled in some lovely country manse."

"What an epicure you are in your choice of an abode, Hilda; and for your sake, as much as my own, I am sorry there is no certainty of my ever having that ideal residence."

"Has the gipsy damped your expectations? Did she not give you a fair amount of encouragement, Tom?"

"Come, secrets must not be lightly revealed, and there is Laddie, faithful and true, waiting to give an account of his stewardship," replied the student as they reached the gate admitting to the back entrance of the farm.

Some time later, as the family were seated round the cosy tea-table, Tom and Hilda's fortune-telling experience became the subject of a good deal of bantering talk and laughter; and the minister in embryo was pretty severely taken over the coals for his encouragement of so questionable an amusement.

"Presbytery, Synod, and Assembly will all be down upon you with fiery alacrity if you don't mend your ways, Tom," said Mr. Oxlade, smiling.

"Possibly enough, were I to offend very often, father; but in truth the old woman was rather an interesting study; something of a philosopher, too, in her own humble way."

"And you've come home well satisfied with the nonsense she talked to you?"

"I speak only for myself when I say I had no reason to be pleased with the colour of my fortune. The seer warned me that my wife would be a troublesome lady to win—nay, she hinted I might never be able to call her more than 'sweetheart'; rather hard lines that, father!" laughed Tom.

"I fancied you were looking a little glum, so

that's the reason of it!" said Andrew, with a broad grin upon his good-natured face.

"And how did you fare, Hilda? Is your luck to be kept a secret?" asked Mr. Oxlade, passing his cup to be replenished by his daughter.

"Oh! I had rather a good fortune, I think; peace and plenty, and all the *etceteras* of a quietly happy life."

"One of the *etceteras* doubtless being a husband," laughed Andrew.

"Even so, sir! The wise one also assured me I was well cared for; and, carefully reading my palm, she said I had grown up ignorant of some terrible sorrow which had brooded over my cradle. Father! what could that be?" Hilda asked quietly.

But Mr. Oxlade did not reply; he lay wearily back in his chair, his eyes closed, and a look of intense suffering spread over his face.

"Father! are you ill?" gasped Hilda, rising and coming over to where her father sat.

"No! oh no! it was but a spasm. It has passed, dear: what were you asking me?"

"Oh! I was telling you the gipsy said I had been kept in ignorance about some shadow which had flitted over my cradle. And I was just wondering if you knew what it was. Was there some bad fairy hovering over me, father?" said Hilda, trying to assume her former gaiety.

A tremor passed over Mr. Oxlade's frame. He put his hand as a shade over his eyes, as if to shut out some painful vision of the dim far-away past; and a second later said in a feeble hesitating voice,

"I think I must go to the door for a breath of air; I feel strangely faint. I have worked too long in the sun to-day, I fear;" and, accompanied by his two sons, he sauntered round the little garden until the feeling of languor had entirely disappeared.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NEW TENANT OF EARLSGRANGE.

A FEW weeks previous to Tom Oxlade's arrival home, the rambling old house of Earlsgrange had been taken possession of by a retired military man and his family. It had long been in the market, long stood empty. Its owner, Mr. Grant, a man of eccentric habits, had, with culpable negligence, allowed it to fall into something approaching a chronic state of disrepair. His health was indifferent, his heir of distant consanguinity, his medical advisers had tabooed it as a residence for him—for all of which reasons he had declared his reluctance to spend money upon it.

Enjoying many advantages of situation and surroundings, Mr. Grant might readily have found a purchaser for it had he been inclined to sell; but this was just what he did not wish to do. Not altogether exempt from the earth-hunger which clings so tenaciously to the Scotsman, he exceedingly disliked the idea of parting with the property, and gladly closed with Major Maxwell's offer to

take it as it stood at a reduced rent, in consideration of his demanding few, if any, repairs.

This arrangement suited the Major admirably. Had money been more abundant he would have scorned the dull, lethargic, jog-trot existence he was forced to lead at Earlsgrange. As it was, however, he welcomed its seclusion, its remoteness from companionable society, and, in taking possession of it, he wisely resolved to tune himself to his new environment, recognising as he did so that the very disadvantages of the place could alone have enabled him to rent it so cheaply as he had done.

A man slightly over fifty, the Major had retired from the army some years before the date of this tale; and, until the education of his children interfered with his migratory tendencies, he had preferred a nomadic existence to a settled permanent abode. When this, however, became necessary, he elected Edinburgh as a residence; and a small main-door house having been secured in a quiet semi-genteel street, he gave himself up to the superintendence of his son's studies, and did his best to curb the almost irresistible longing for travel which his limited income could but ill afford.

The tranquillity and seeming success of settling in the Scotch Metropolis was, some eight years later, suddenly brought to an unhappy termination by the young man's developing undoubted symptoms of lunacy.

He had made choice of his life's work, and had but entered upon the medical studies necessary to qualify for it, when a violent outbreak, following

upon his former strangely altered, irritable, and depressed state of mind, rendered confinement in an asylum inevitable. This occurrence put an end to the lad's promising professional career, and filled his father's heart with a keen and bitter hatred towards the youth, whom he had ever treated with a severity unexercised towards his daughter, a girl some two years or so younger than her brother.

The *raison d'être* of living in Edinburgh having thus strangely been put an end to by Karl's incapacity for study, Major Maxwell resolved upon seeking out some retired place of residence to which he could fetch him when sufficiently restored to warrant his liberation.

The plan, when submitted to the doctors in charge, entirely met with their approbation, for, though they affirmed that the lad would, in all probability, be unfit for the responsibilities of a medical life, he would, they felt sure, ultimately regain intelligence sufficient to render him not only a safe inmate of a private dwelling, but likewise to warrant his engaging in some less onerous calling.

Hence, strongly resenting the necessity for the change, grudgingly regretting the money already spent, and burning with indignation at having his son thrown upon his hands, Major Maxwell removed to Earlsgrange, resolving to watch what effect a year's retirement from his former pursuits would have upon the unfortunate youth, who, he still hoped, would be able to earn his livelihood in some humbler walk of life than that formerly anticipated.

If Mrs. Maxwell had any voice in the impending

change, it certainly was a feeble one. The Major had never allowed her to suppose herself qualified to direct or advise in any important step of their united journey through life. He abrogated all authority; and from lack of other interests, and from the fact of having so much time upon his hands, he had acquired a thorough intimacy with household matters, with the meanest of which he never hesitated to own he had more than a bowing acquaintance.

In the children's education, and Karl's later choice of a profession, Mrs. Maxwell had, from the long habit of yielding to her husband's wishes, taken little or no interest; the one branch over which she exercised any care being her daughter's water-colour lessons, and this arose from her own love of art, and her desire that Marjory should cultivate the decided talent with which she seemed gifted. With this exception the Major actively superintended all other studies, bestowing upon them an amount of attention, which, if not always appreciated by the young people, certainly betokened an anxiety that they should gain as much profit as possible from their respective teachers, by the efficient home preparation neither was ever allowed to neglect.

In addition to this self-imposed task, the Major found scope for his energies in relieving his wife of many litle domestic duties generally discharged by the mistress of a household. He evinced no aversion to visiting the butcher, the baker, or the grocer; nor did he ever fight shy of interviewing

the applicants for the post of 'light general' when a change of hand-maiden caused such a procedure to become necessary. Some ladies would have disliked their husband's activity in household management—Mrs. Maxwell was indifferent to it. She had been deeply in love when she married, but lapse of years had considerably cooled the ardour of her affection; and though she was by no means a miserable woman, yet neither could she be called a pre-eminently happy one.

Gentle faced, sweet, placid-looking, Mrs. Maxwell united the simplicity of a child with the dignity and self-possession of a woman; whilst her good-nature and dislike of loquacious arguments ever led her to evince a sort of languid acceptance of her husband's proceedings. Experience, too, had taught her that prominent discussion of her own views always resulted in his following the bent of his own inclinations, and brought about an expenditure of time and energy which might with advantage be devoted to some more congenial occupation. Consequently, though deeply regretting the untimely interruption of Marjory's studies, she never for a moment suggested that, for her sake, the town house should be retained; but quietly submitting to her husband's judgment, vaguely wondered as she did so, whether indeed the hopes they both cherished as to their boy's recovery should be realised, or if, on the contrary, he was doomed to suffer relapses of the malady she dreaded.

The first few weeks of residence at Earlsgrange

proved rather unsatisfactory ones to Mrs. Maxwell. She had quite understood that the place being out of repair was the reason of the merely nominal rent they were to pay for it; but nevertheless it took a little time to reconcile her to the discomforts the want of the much-needed alterations entailed. It was summer, however, and the bright lovely weather which inducted them into their new abode continuing, both she and Marjory delighted to live as much as possible in the open air, where, forgetting its dilapidation, they could enjoy the freedom the retirement of their new home secured.

Marjory's mirth and gladness were not damped by the dingy interior of the weather-beaten old house. She wisely closed her eyes to its many defects, revelled in sunshine, and determined to extract as much pleasure as possible from her simple environment.

The well-stocked garden, the rural walks, the moorland heath, and above all, the loch, soon became her favourite haunts. The novelty of the change fascinated her; and when, a couple of weeks after her own arrival, it was announced that Karl was sufficiently recovered to be able to join his family, her happiness was complete.

The Major's reception of his son was less genial than that accorded him by his mother and sister. From earliest childhood he had in all his dealings pursued so rigid a course of severity that the lad's affections had become estranged; and Mrs. Maxwell was not slow to observe that the six months of separation had not tended to enkindle any warmer

feeling than of yore towards the father, who, under the guise of nonchalance, tried to conceal the bitterness of the disappointment he was experiencing in the total overthrow of the expectations he had cherished regarding the youth.

## CHAPTER V.

### KARL AND MARJORY.

TO the careless passing glance of the uninterested stranger, Karl Maxwell displayed no marked signs of impaired intellect. He conducted himself in a manner so thoroughly rational that only those who had been familiar with his former elasticity of step, his enthusiasm, his light-hearted gladness, could fathom the meaning of the total want of youthful attributes which characterised the lad, wandering in silent, gloomy, self-concentration amidst the new surroundings to which he had been brought. The first few days, he passed without comment upon the change from town to country life. Responsive to every inquiry, he volunteered few, if any, remarks of his own; scrupulously polite in his bearing to all, he sought fellowship with none; his whole demeanour was indicative of a painful sense of humiliation at the position in which he found himself placed.

As the days glided on, however, Karl's depression began to be varied by transitory gleams of brighter intelligence.

He became less averse to companionship. He

moved about in a less listless manner, and Mrs. Maxwell gladly noticed how he gradually began to awake from the apathy, which was so trying to witness, and to evince a sympathetic interest in the affairs of others.

On one of July's loveliest, warmest days, as Marjory sat securely perched on the branch of an old apple tree, Karl, who had been meditatively pacing the garden walk, suddenly stopping in his stroll, inquired if she knew how long they were likely to remain at Earlsgrange.

"I really don't know; I'm quite in my element up here; come and let us have a talk, please do, Karl," she replied, eagerly wishful to interest him in anything.

But Karl paid no heed to the pleading request until he had made the circuit of the garden a second time, when he drew near and quickly demanded, "Is it long since you came here? How long?"

"Exactly two weeks before you arrived. What think you of our new abode, Karl?"

"I do not like it. Was it on my account that you left Edinburgh?"

"Oh! Karl! don't bother me with questions; it is really too hot to answer them," said Marjory, uncertain how to reply to his inquiries.

"Never mind, then. I daresay mother will be willing to tell me," rejoined the lad rather petulantly, whilst he resumed his stroll with a more active step than formerly.

In a trice Marjory was off her seat and walking by her brother's side, her arm linked in his. The

little blink of interest he had shown in their household movements she wished to foster; and full of ruth that the return of reason had not been accompanied by the tractableness and brightness of disposition which had formerly characterised him, she did her best to wean him from the grave taciturnity into which he was lapsing.

Gradually responding to her advances, Karl by-and-by shook off his little fit of petulance, and became an attentive listener to all his sister had to tell him of their new home and its surroundings. He occasionally put a question or two, and not infrequently he referred to the class-work of the previous college session, as if fully contemplating a continuance of those studies which had been so painfully interrupted. Presently joined by the Major, Karl declared that he was tired of the garden, and proposed that he and Marjory should extend their stroll beyond the narrow precincts, which were boring him, he said. This proposition by Karl was hailed as a strong indication that the youth was awakening from the apathy that enthralled him; there was in it something to show the loss of that sensitiveness he had at first felt on resuming the social intercourse from which he had been so long debarred.

"On the whole I prefer keeping within our own boundary line, but as you are tired of your limited horizon, come, and I'll take you to the loch-side," the Major assented, unwilling to thwart the not unnatural request to explore the district lying outside the Earlsgrange grounds.

"I'm beginning to find there is little enough scope for a fellow here, father; it's a very dull sort of life to lead, though Marjory seems to approve of its tameness," Karl remarked slowly.

"It's holiday-time you know, and a spell of *laissez-faire* will do you no harm. I chose the place with a view to its strengthening and bracing you up; the air is a tonic in itself, Karl, and I am sure will do you incalculable good, if you will but make up your mind to profit by it," rejoined Major Maxwell emphatically.

"And how do you employ your time here? Do you fish or shoot, or simply move about as we are doing now?"

"Hear how I occupy myself, Karl! I never find the day's twenty-four hours hang heavily upon my hands," cried Marjory gaily, wishing to disperse the cloud she saw settling on her father's brow.

"Well! I suppose you don't spend all your time in the branches of the trees you have learned to climb so nimbly, though to be sure I see you there pretty often," Karl replied in the more genial tone he adopted in addressing his sister.

"Not quite all, though I'm never more comfortable than when I'm seated in one of them, I assure you! Mother and I have chosen our 'bits,' and are busy with our brushes for several hours each day. I have the neighbourhood to explore too; and though I neither fish nor shoot, I have already succeeded in making myself so agreeable to Mr. Grant's old caretaker, gardener, and jack-of-all-trades, that he invariably lets me know when he is going to visit

his son, who lives on the opposite side of the loch, and in this way I have become a capital rower! I believe I could cross the loch quite dexterously by myself."

"Ah, then, there is a prospect of getting some boating, at least, Marjory!" rejoined Karl.

"That depends upon whether or not you endear yourself to Fairbairn as I have done," laughed Marjory.

Karl smiled; his sister's good-nature was contagious. The doctors had certainly been right when they assured the Major that a little time would alone be necessary to rub off the gloomy taciturnity which a knowledge of his malady had begotten. "That time is approaching," said Major Maxwell to himself, as he gravely walked by the lad's side and noted how Marjory's mirth was gradually weaning him from his former listlessness.

There was not much time to linger by the loch-side; a short stroll by its shores, a rapid inspection of the little boat-house, and then the Major remarking that unless they returned at once they would be late for dinner, they somewhat reluctantly turned their faces homewards.

"Have you enjoyed your outing, Karl?" asked Marjory, as they again reached the roadway from which they had diverged to get to the loch.

"Yes, it has killed some time for me, and that in itself is no small mercy. But I thought we had no neighbours; who are these two strangers at the stile yonder?"

The Major and Marjory, glancing in the direction

indicated by Karl, recognised the figures at the dyke-side to be Mr. Oxlade and his son Tom. The former had been inspecting the fields of almost ripe grain, and calculating how soon harvest operations might probably begin; whilst Tom, totally unskilled in matters agricultural, had preferred lingering by the roadway until his father returned from his survey of the fields.

"Oh! that's young Mr. Oxlade who did me such yeoman service a few days ago! And his father, probably; is it not?" replied Marjory, addressing the latter inquiry to the Major, while at the same time she bowed to Tom.

"Yes! fortunately we go in different directions. Walk on with your brother, Marjory; I may as well say 'How do you do' to the old man after your indebtedness to his son," rejoined the Major, patronisingly.

Marjory was about to obey her father's commands, when a sudden impulse caused her to turn her head, and, as she did so, she found Tom's eyes following herself and Karl with a frank, questioning look of unsatisfied curiosity. "That's a nice-like fellow, Marjory; what is he? Not a farmer, surely?" asked Karl, by no means displeased at being alone with his sister again.

"I don't know; but his father is the farmer at Denetap. See! you just catch a glimpse of the house through the trees there. I made his acquaintance in a strange enough way, didn't I?" laughed Marjory, remembering her misadventure at the loch.

"Yes, rather!"

"And do you know it was quite a new pair of boots I had on? Mother grieves over my loss every time she goes to the loch!"

"Well, the human physiognomy is not quite so scarce a commodity as I fancied, considering we've really seen two specimens of the race in our walk," remarked Karl, resignedly.

"Sometimes there are passers-by, but not often. It seems that our landlord, when living here, was a sort of hermit, and we are going to follow in his footsteps; in which case, we'll have to prove 'each other's own best company.' So see, Karl, that you respond to my attentions like the dear old fellow you ever were."

"I'll never more be as I was, Marjory. I've drunk the cup of humiliation to the dregs, and I cannot forget its bitterness—I cannot forget how people will shrink from me!"

"Nonsense! we've lived all our lives without caring a pin's point what people thought, said, or did; and we don't mean to take them into our confidence and tell them our secrets at this time of day. Forget it all, Karl, as I would, were I in your place, and let us be as happy as circumstances will allow," said Marjory, reassuringly, as the Major overtook them.

"Well, I've been longer than I expected; but when a farmer begins to speak about his crops he never knows when to stop," he said, apologetically.

"Is Mr. Oxlade a nice old man, father?" asked Marjory.

"He seems a decent, respectable fellow—very civil and obliging."

"And what is his son?"

"A farmer; he has just been telling me harvest will begin in about ten days or a fortnight. The land hereabouts is 'a bit teuch,' and the crops are later accordingly, he says."

"The son does not look a farmer, father. Is there just the one?"

"No, Marjoram, there are two. The elder is the one to whom I referred, however."

"And the one you met just now, what is he?"

"He is expected one day to wag his pow in a poopit. During the vacation he picks up a living by tutoring. He is leaving the day after to-morrow for a situation. Have you any more questions to ask, Miss Curiosity?"

"Yes! Are there any daughters at Denetap? Tell me before you go in; you won't take a second to do that!" laughed Marjory, as they once again stood on the doorstep of Earlsgrange.

"Mr. Oxlade tells me he has one daughter who acts as his housekeeper. Are you satisfied? For if not, any other questions must lie over until after dinner," rejoined the Major, glancing hastily at his watch, and running upstairs to prepare himself for the punctually-served meal.

## CHAPTER VI.

### FATHER AND SON.

THE freedom gradually permitted Karl was followed by an amendment in health and spirits, eminently gratifying to Major and Mrs. Maxwell. The lad no longer openly rebelled at the narrow limits of his environment; he became tractable, and even genial. And, as the days glided into weeks, the Major began to relax a little in the vigilance he had judged it wise to exercise, and under which Karl had secretly writhed, resenting the constant oversight of his movements and doings as unnecessary and misplaced zeal on the part of his father.

The pure country air had proved a medicine more potent by far than the most sanguine had anticipated. With invigorated health, and more cheerful spirits, Karl ceased to brood over the seclusion of his life and the cause which had led to it. He entered, if not with zest, at least without complaint, into the daily routine of the household's arrangements; and, if the cup of life of which he was invited to drink was not entirely to his

taste, he concealed his dislike of the potion so successfully, swallowed its contents so complacently, that not even Marjory suspected that to the sensitive palate of her brother the cup lacked sweetness, nor that there were times when its bitterness galled him. Yet, so it was. Invigorated health of body had brought vigour of mind and of purpose. The fact of his confinement in an asylum had, upon his recovery, overwhelmed him with a shame which held him silent; but, as time passed, this sense of shame yielded to the untiring advances of his kindred, and he became not only willing, but anxious, to reap the benefit of the rural surroundings prescribed for him, and manfully endeavoured to obliterate the remembrance of the miserable past by giving himself up to the out-of-door *laissez-faire* existence dictated by his father.

In doing this, however, Karl never lost sight of a task he had set himself. An affliction such as had overtaken him in the full buoyancy of his youthful career must, he reasoned, have some predisposing cause. Was that predisposition hereditary? If so, would not bright, laughing, merry-hearted Marjory be as liable to it as himself? The thought was terrible. He put it far from him, resolving that, ere approaching his father, he would arm himself with some medical information upon a point so intimately connected with his own peace of mind.

Summer's prime was hastening to its close when Karl, having studied certain chapters on the all-important question of heredity, decided that at

length the propitious moment for its discussion as relative to himself had arrived.

To spend the winter months in idleness at Earlsgrange, instead of resuming his medical studies in Edinburgh, was an idea most distasteful, and one that was causing him no little anxiety. And as this was what his father seemed to expect of him, the sooner, thought he, the matter is brought before him, the better able shall I be to carve out a course of action calculated to fit me for my future work. Accordingly, one bright September morning, having declined to accompany Mrs. Maxwell and Marjory on their daily sketching expedition, Karl boldly entered the little parlour retained by the Major for his own special use, and, taking a seat opposite him, quietly asked what plans were to be made anent resuming his studies during the ensuing session.

Raising his eyes from the correspondence with which he was engaged, the Major, surprised at the startling interrogation, replied hastily—

"I thought you understood that I didn't wish you to work this coming session."

"But why, father? Surely I am fit for a busier, fuller life than that I am leading here?"

"I have stated my wishes; I do not feel called upon to give you my reasons. Suffice it to say, I do not mean to return to Edinburgh for some time—if at all."

The Major spoke in a low, constrained voice. There was an expression in his son's face which deterred him from ignoring altogether the lad's

anxiety to know his probable movements; whilst a look of steady determination about his mouth compelled him to treat him no longer as a child, but as a man suddenly aroused to a sense of his moral responsibilities; and, lying back in his chair, he calmly awaited his response.

"You must have some reason for cutting short my studies; until I know what it is, I look upon a long stay here as a cruel waste of my time and opportunities. Father! tell me how it is that you have become indifferent to my preparing for my future profession. Your reasons may be the best in the world, but I have a right to know them."

"Your illness unfitted you for continuing your classes—of that you are aware."

"Yes; but does that illness unfit me still from qualifying for my future work as a doctor? I am able to bear whatever you have to tell me."

"I have nothing to tell you. I think you had better go and meet your mother and sister; you will find them sketching somewhere near the loch. It 's too fine a morning to be spent in the house."

"Father! you will let me stay to speak to you upon a subject which is giving me a great deal of anxiety. I cannot settle my mind to anything until I discuss it with you, and I shall have no peace until you answer one or two questions I have long thought of putting to you. You will spare me half-an-hour, father; it 's not often I intrude into your sanctum here."

"Well! what would you have?"

"I wish to ask you, father, if—, if——," but, as the young man spoke, his voice died away; the question was so hard a one to put to a parent, that, for a moment, it unnerved the speaker, and he paused to regain the fortitude he felt was deserting him.

"In Heaven's name, what are you stuttering about?" uttered in a low, hoarse tone, helped to man Karl for the ordeal, and he once more assayed the difficult task, though his voice faltered as he spoke.

"I want to know, father, if I inherit any predisposition to—to such attacks as that I suffered from in Edinburgh. Is there any tendency to such in our family?"

At last the dread words were uttered, and Karl, pale as death, leaning forward, rested his elbows upon the table, whilst, for a moment, he covered his tense, strained face with his hands, almost fearing to hear the answer to his question.

Major Maxwell remained silent; a heavy frown was settling upon his brow; he paid no heed to the inquiry made by his son; and in the stillness, in the oppressive silence of the room, Karl again spoke.

"I have a right to ask; you cannot refuse to let me know. The worst you have to tell me will be better than the cruel uncertainty which forces me to seek the truth. Speak, father, I am no boy, but a man; and, with the courage of a man, will I bear whatever you tell me."

A muttered oath broke from the Major's lips;

and, clenching his hands, he cried, "You're a fool, Charles Maxwell, to meddle with matters beyond your comprehension! Leave the room, sir, and take my curse along with you!"

Rising to his feet, Karl stood in speechless astonishment at the storm his words had raised. His face was ashy pale; saving that, however, there was no outward demonstration to tell of the struggle at work within. Quietly, mechanically, after a moment's consideration, he resumed his seat, prepared to wait until his father's wrath should subside. The steadily maintained silence remained unbroken for several minutes. The noon-day sun, flooding the earth with splendour and beauty, seemed to mock at the misery within the sombre little room, seemed to urge the two men to cease their strife ere eventide should see him hide his head in the west. Peace, peace, was the message wafted by the still, autumnal beauty of earth, by Heaven above, by every motion of tree and leaf, as, swayed by the gentle breeze, they rustled against the window panes of the room, and peered within at the stern, anxious countenances of its occupants.

A movement on the Major's part ultimately encouraged Karl to break the silence which was becoming intolerable, and in a low strained voice he besought his father to answer the question he had put.

"Were you a stranger, sir, I would horsewhip you for your insolence; but as, unfortunately, you are my son, your deserts will meet with a weightier punishment by simply assenting to

your request! I shall answer your questions, if so be that you still wish to put them; but, mark my words, your welfare, your happiness will not be augmented by this day's doings. If you think better of it, a sign of your doing so will be to leave the room."

The Major's tone was harsh and cruel; his voice vibrated with the vindictive triumph he fancied he had gained over the youth, whose face, rigid and white, met the stony gaze fixed upon it with a steadiness that betrayed no manifestation of succumbing, not the slightest intention of shirking the revelation he now felt awaited him.

"I still wish to hear; tell me everything," Karl said, slowly.

"And you shall!—the answer to the question you should never have asked is an affirmative one."

"But—but—from whom do I inherit it? Speak—speak, father, I implore you!"

"From your mother."

"My mother!" and in Karl's voice there was a wail of agony which might have softened a heart of stone. It fell unheeded, however, upon the Major, who sat an unmoved spectator of his son's anguish.

"From your father you inherit an iron constitution. The Maxwells come of a long-lived, healthy stock; not one of them, I believe, ever died of any disease save the incurable one—'Threescore-years-and-ten.' Your grandfather was eighty-five when he shuffled off this mortal coil."

"But my mother? She—she has escaped the evil. She has never suffered as I have done?"

"You wished the truth; I warned you it had better be untold. I would have hidden it from you, but for your ill-starred persistency."

"It's better to know it, father, better and wiser," answered Karl under his breath, an expression of horror spreading over his face, livid in its first grasp of the truth hurled at him by the man opposite, the father to whom he had never denied the homage and reverence due from a son, but to whom, alas! he had not been able to bring the love spontaneously given his mother and sister.

"I have gratified your curiosity; you may leave me now, surely." Nerved by the words and voice to further inquiry, the lad answered—

"Not yet. It—this awful inheritance, sometimes passes over one generation and attacks the following. Mother has been spared, but who knows if Marjory will escape. I cannot bear to think of her—being as—I was——."

"Confound you! What in Heaven's name have you and your sufferings to do with the girl and ——."

"Forgive me, father! I was but thinking if poor Marjory could, like mother, escape from it, I could the more readily bear the frightful heritage bequeathed me," said Karl, softly, his thoughts wandering away to the merry-hearted sister, whose mirth and song filled the house with a brightness no one else could impart to it.

"Ah! I have no fears about Marjory! And now

that you have extracted what I meant to withhold from you, it will be well that——."

"Yes, what?"

"It will be best, I say, that the taint in your blood should not be handed down to future generations. You seem to have studied the question of heredity, and will understand what I mean," said the Major, relentless in his severity, no leaven of pity arising in his heart at sight of the suffering he was inflicting.

"I understand; I shall never marry. Not for worlds would I entail upon son of mine the misery you have entailed upon yours!" replied Karl, in a voice so toneless that the Major bent forward to catch the words.

"You are wise; a man has the welfare of others to consider in addition to his own."

"Would to God, father, your theory had been put in practice! Forgive one more question—but did you know my mother had such a legacy to bequeath her children?"

"No, a thousand times, No! I only learned it when it was too late; and I think I could have killed her when I realised what a curse she had brought to my house," replied Major Maxwell, heavy drops of perspiration standing upon his brow.

"Poor mother! Father, be merciful to her! It is I who am the sufferer, and I shall bear in silence," said Karl, leaning his head upon the table in the agonish of despair.

Some faint grain of pity stirred the Major's

heart at sight of the lad's grief, and in a gentler voice he said, "I would willingly have saved you this pain, Karl; remember I warned you to control your curiosity. You should not have provoked me to tell you what I have."

"It is better as it is! The knowledge will prevent my transmitting my fatal inheritance to others. I thank you, father, from the bottom of my heart," rejoined Karl, whilst a weary, far-away look crept into the sad brown eyes, and his voice thrilled with pain as he spoke.

"Well! we need not protract the discussion further. This is a page of our life's book better turned over at once; let us put the seal of silence upon it. You will speak of it to none, and least of all to your sister—you agree to this?"

"Yes; I will dree my weird in silence and alone, father."

"In doing so do not forget that from me you inherit strong counterbalancing advantages. The Maxwell blood is in your veins as well as—that other," said the Major, if not repentant of his severity, at least desirous of banishing some traces of its effects ere the return of his wife and daughter.

"Nothing can compensate, for nothing can efface my heritage," rejoined Karl, preparing to leave the room.

"Stay a moment longer; there is never any use of taking two bites of a cherry. As I have told you so much, I'd better wind up the matter by giving you a letter I have lying in my desk; it will save you boring me again upon a subject I

wish forgotten. I penned it, intending that it should be given you after my death, or, if necessary for the welfare of others, before that; but, as your curiosity has led you to probe the question of heredity, the time seems ripe to trust you with it. That time I should willingly have postponed, but one thing leads on to another, and your foolish conduct to-day prompts me to let you have it at once," said Major Maxwell, taking a sealed letter from a tiny secret drawer of his desk and giving it to his son.

In surprise at this action on his father's part, Karl, simply reading the superscription on the envelope, remained silent whilst the Major continued, "Do not open the letter until the evening, or later, if you choose; there is no hurry for you doing so. And remember to maintain a discreet silence upon this morning's discussion—never speak to Marjory especially, upon so painful, so distasteful a subject."

"I shall not, now that I know she too is liable to become even as I was, father; hard and bitter as it is, ten times heavier would the stroke have fallen upon me had you withheld the knowledge, until —until I had formed ties it would have cost another's happiness to break as well as my own. I thank you for complying with my request," Karl answered, sadly. So low and so full of suppressed anguish was the tone of voice that the Major started and would have questioned further, but ere he could speak the young man had reached the door.

The interview was over, the question settled, and Karl withdrew from his father's presence racked and soul-torn by the weight of sorrow and despair he was doomed henceforth to bear about with him.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BLIGHTED HOPES.

"They say I may marry the laird if I will,
The laird of high degree,
And jewels so fair I may twine in my hair,
And a lady I'd surely be."

THE weather-beaten, gloomy, old house re-echoed the words pretty Marjory Maxwell was singing in her clear, fresh young treble. Exhilarated by her morning's outing, the girl had returned full of a gaiety of heart strangely at variance with the melancholy atmosphere pervading the untenanted rooms, into which she peeped in quest of her brother, to whom she wished to exhibit her finished landscape before putting it safely away. This water-colour was Marjory's *chef-d'œuvre*; of it she felt pardonably proud as an interesting representation of the spot where she had sat dipping her feet in the loch, oblivious of the fact that her boot was fast floating beyond her reach.

It was a carefully-executed piece of workmanship, displaying so much progress in drawing and

colouring that, as a reward for the pains bestowed upon it, Mrs. Maxwell had promised that, when sending some of her own work for exhibition in Edinburgh, Marjory's should likewise go to be framed; and, when returned, should be hung where she chose. Desirous of hearing Karl's criticism and approval, Marjory bounded upstairs in search of him, lightly singing as she went—

"But, oh, where would my heart be
In spite of my gems so gay?
My heart it would break for *nobody's* sake,
So I think I had better say *Yea*."

"Oh, Janet, love-lorn Janet! that should have been your answer to 'the laird' with his 'jewels so fair,'" she laughed, as she threw off her hat and jacket, and then gently tapped at her brother's door, humming anew as she entered.

"Congratulate me, dear old chum; I've finished my landscape, and it awaits your opinion downstairs. Mother thinks it worth framing, and I think it just the very thing to hang up in this dismal old den of yours. Will you have it?" cried Marjory, gaily.

For an hour or more Karl had been pacing his room, his hands clasped behind his back, lost in a reverie of thought. From the window he had seen his mother and sister return from the loch-side. He had heard them enter the house. He had listened to Marjory's clear, ringing voice singing the old-fashioned song she had lately taken a fancy to. And at the sound of her bright girlish mirth he had shuddered, horror-stricken anew, as his

thoughts, darting back to the revelations of the morning, contrasted her free, careless, light-hearted present with the but too probable dark, heavy-clouded future awaiting her. Her entrance aroused him from a contemplation so terrible; he turned to greet her, forcing a faint, worn smile to the face which still bore the stamp of the mental conflict through which he had passed.

"Ah! you have really finished it?" he said, in answer to her inquiry.

The tone was so weary and sad that it at once arrested Marjory's attention.

"Yes; but what's gone wrong? Are you not feeling well, Karl?" she asked, sympathetically.

"I have a sort of headache—not very bad—but sufficiently so to make me feel cross and stupid."

"Poor old fellow! You should have been out instead of moping by yourself all morning. You are sure it is nothing more than a headache, though? You look as if you had seen all the ghosts of Earlsgrange in a body!"

"One ghost is enough at a time; and I've been entertaining a bad enough one! But let me see your drawing."

"Oh, I left it downstairs; come and I'll show it you. It's the best I've done, and I'm longing for the time when my work will be good enough to bring me some of the pounds, shillings, and pence it's so difficult to do without in this weary world."

"Ah! I fancied you were too devoted to Art for

its own sake to think of making money out of it," rejoined Karl, conscious that, spite of his weariness and heart-sickness, he must submit to the exigencies of life; that he must talk and smile, and affect an interest he was far from feeling in the daily round of activities; that, not until the household had retired for the night, would he have quiet and seclusion for pondering and weighing how far the facts disclosed by his father would bear upon the future.

"Dear old Karl! know once and for all that the *raison d'être* of my devotion to painting is to make it pay! I love it for its own sake; but I love it ten times more when I think of what I mean it to bring me! Don't be shocked; but I've so often felt the want of a silver lining to my purse that I've determined to work for it," laughed Marjory, as she began to pirouette round the dingy old room.

"I daresay you will get on by degrees; but come, either bring me your picture or let me go down to it; you have forgotten its existence already, I believe."

"Stay where you are and I'll run for it; father's in the dining-room now, I hear," said Marjory, as she ran down the staircase humming—

"And I will marry my own love,
My own love, my own love;
And I will marry my own love,
For true of heart am I."

"See, father! I'm going to have this framed for

Karl's den," she said, holding up her finished sketch for the Major's inspection.

"Ah, it's very pretty!"

"How can you say so when your eyes are half closed, father! You haven't looked at it at all," cried Marjory, noticing Major Maxwell's indifference to her work.

"I see it perfectly! You have disturbed me, coming in so abruptly, singing a milk-maid's song," replied the Major, without glancing at the picture in his daughter's hand.

"It's one of my favourites just now, father; and Mrs. Warwick sings it beautifully; if you could hear her, I'm sure you would admire it as much as I do. What's wrong with it?"

"The words are silly—very silly."

"Well, I've altered some of them, but whether I've improved upon the original or not, I won't decide," laughed Marjory.

"Where is your brother? Do you know?"

"Upstairs. He has been entertaining a ghost during my absence, and his companionship has given him a headache, father."

"In that case tell him that if he feels disinclined for dinner I shall excuse him coming down. Perhaps a walk will do him good, and banish his ghostly companion. If he thinks so, you may go along with him."

"All right, fatherkin; but I'm very much disposed for my dinner, and I hope it's a good one, for I'm starving!" said Marjory, preparing to withdraw from the room.

"Be good enough to deliver my message exactly as I've told it you. You are beginning to show a flippancy most unbecoming in a young person of your age. I meant the walk to follow the dinner, of course."

"*Excusez-moi, mon père;* the young person stands corrected; she is decidedly young for her age. Isn't she? and a terrible bore to boot! Just never mind her, though; give her her fling, and she'll sober down by-and-by," laughed Marjory, throwing a kiss to the Major as she reached the door, and beginning to hum—

"Youth is the time to be cheery, O!
Let the world gang tapsalteerie, O!"

The landscape having been duly admired and pronounced to be beyond criticism, Marjory delivered her father's message to her brother, adding, however, that, in her opinion, dinner would do him good and not harm.

A cloud passed over Karl's face as he replied, "I really couldn't swallow a morsel, Marjory. I'll go for a walk, though; and if you like to come and join me, you'll find me not far from the stile close by the young plantation."

"And you aren't hungry?"

"Not at all. Tell mother not to worry, I'll be all right soon."

"Very well, old man; I'm sorry, though, that you won't be persuaded to eat something. I very much fear that you and father have been naughty boys this forenoon; he is as cross as two sticks,

and you are all over cobwebs. What does it mean?"

"Cross to you! you don't say that, surely?" asked Karl, smilingly.

"But I do. When mother and I went out this morning we left you both hale and hearty—as Fairbairn would say—tolerably good-natured and contented, too. When we come back we find you possessed by a spirit of gloom and of contradiction. One complains of a headache, the other of my flippancy. What were you both doing during our absence?" inquired Marjory, beginning to suspect that something had gone awry between father and son.

"We were entertaining ghosts, Marjoram, nothing more," replied Karl, in a low, faltering voice, a strange, weird smile breaking over his pallid face, as he slowly turned towards the window.

"I quite believe it, old chum, for they have left the aroma of their presence behind, and I'm glad I didn't form one of the party! But there goes the dinner-bell; and so ta-ta until I meet you at the stile, that is if you are still determined to go dinnerless!"

"Yes, quite! A walk is the one thing to do me good; perhaps I may have something afterwards," said Karl, his patience almost exhausted by the well-meaning, though ill-timed, attentions of his sister.

* * * * *

Amid the gathering shadows of the fast-shortening September day, Karl sat alone in his room.

He had joined his family at early tea, and, having satisfied his mother that there was nothing more seriously wrong than the headache formerly complained of, he had shortly thereafter retired, presumably to seek the rest she prescribed as the all-potent remedy for his indisposition.

Rest, however, was impossible. He had his father's letter yet to read, and, until that was done, he could make no resolutions, no plans for bridging the gulf he now felt the revelations of the morning raised between him and the profession of his choice. Carefully locking the door as a precaution against the interruption he dreaded, Karl threw himself into an easy chair, took the letter from his pocket, examined the strong, bold handwriting of the address, and, with a beating, fluttering heart, quickly broke the seal.

As he read, the expression of his face changed from grave interest to one of transfixed horror, and, as he finished the brief epistle, the low, bitter cry of a man who had been stabbed through and through, fell from his lips. The letter dropped from his hands; he leant forward, laid his head upon the table, and, in the silence, in the gloom of the dimly-lighted chamber, wrestled with the horrible nightmare presented to him by his father's pen.

For several hours Karl sat immovable in his chair; a low groan, an indistinctly uttered 'mother,' alone fell from his white, pained lips. His imagination had conjured up a picture of horror too terrible to dwell upon. He became a witness of

the sufferings, he watched the effects of the awful curse in the person of another—as detailed to him by his father—nor could he rid himself of the vision he had raised; a vision of one so closely allied to himself, that already he felt a paroxysm of fear settling over him as he sat.

Midnight striking on the old-fashioned hall clock aroused him from the contemplation of the evil heritage bequeathed him by his mother's family, and, as the last chime died away, a hurried retreating footstep from his door revealed the fact that his father had been on guard without. Indignant that his movements should be under surveillance, that his outbursts of despair should possibly have been heard, Karl hastily rose from his chair, and stood listening until he heard the Major's bedroom door opened and closed. Then, beginning to pace up and down the floor, his spirit rose in revolt at the hardness of his fate, the unfathomable mystery of the destiny which had thus shipwrecked his life, and crushed to atoms the many hopes he had fostered.

The foundations of his dream-world lay shattered around him. No longer could he look forward to entering the profession he had chosen. Not again would he look upon the fair face of the girl he had hoped, by-and-by, to win for his bride. Never more; never more. And as the dark, heavy curtain of despair fell, it left him chilled and benumbed, alone with the self he was beginning to abhor. Whilst, beyond and above his reach, separated by a gulf, impassable and deep, lay

the world in which he had pictured himself labouring to win success, and love, and joy, and all that made life worth having.

And now that world was barred, inevitably barred, against him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

WHILST the household at Earlsgrange were wrapped in the slumber which he could not, would not, seek, Karl Maxwell communed in secret with his own heart. He had told his father he was able to dree his weird in silence and alone, and he determined to act in accordance with the promise given.

The first streaks of the rising sun found the lonely watcher still struggling for the victory over the tempestuous, wrathful spirit, which, in the wild frenzy of his first despair, urged him to solve the problem of life and action for the future by for ever putting an end to these. The means to do so stood ready within his grasp. A single touch of the cold steel of that razor, so perilously near his hand, would deal kindly and gently with him. A single thrust would save him years of misery, years of isolation from his fellows, a voice seemed ever to whisper in his ear—and more than once he was about to succumb to the temptation.

Seizing the case of razors he fingered it deftly and lovingly, whilst a ghastly smile rippled about his mouth as he experimented with one across his throat, and then replaced it upon the table. Yes! yes! the remedy lay sure enough within his reach; but it would keep, there was no necessity for immediate haste; and thus reflecting, the unhappy youth carefully hid the case from view, and drawing his chair to the window, sat down in a more placid, less despondent state of mind.

The labours of the new day were beginning. Fairbairn was abroad and busily engaged in the stable; and as Karl sat watching the hale old man going to and fro, happy in the daily round of duties that engrossed him, a pang of envy shot through him as he contrasted his own lot with that of the humble servant, whose greatest ambition never extended further than, as he so frequently expressed it, "Jist tae keep things a' richt while the maister's awa."

A slight movement at the open casement caused the man to look up, and, recognising the lad, he smilingly touched his cap as he inquired—

"Wad ye an' Miss like tae gang tae the loch the day, Maister Karl? I'm gaun ower tae see my son, an' gin ye think o't, I'll be blithe tae gie ye baith a sail."

In a moment Karl's head was over the window, and he was closing with Fairbairn's offer. And, when a second later he was again in his chair, a weird, pathetic smile broke over his face as he whispered softly to himself, "That's better still.

Poor old Fairbairn little knows what a blessing he is proving to me." Then, rising hastily, he replaced the case of razors upon his dressing-table, slowly stroking it as he muttered, "You were willing to serve me; but the loch will tell no such tale as you would! 'Accidental case of drowning of an only son'—how well it will read in the public prints! What a deal of trouble and exposure it will save father and the rest! And Marjory too! Poor Marjoram will be able to weep and lament over her brother's untimely end. Yes! it's always well to honour the respectabilities when possible, and fate, in the form of Fairbairn, is making it easy for me to do so."

Grasping at the opportunity so innocently offered, Karl decided to discipline his features and conduct himself as best he could in order to lead his father to suppose that his epistle, if read, had affected him but slightly. The dreary, wide horizon of despair which, but a few minutes earlier, had, looming ahead, stunned and benumbed him, was now narrowed to a passable gulf, and he began to look forward to bridging it, without regret. Life, denuded of all that was best and sweetest, he would not have; and, as if to brace him for the step he was determined to take, he once more drew forth his father's letter and slowly re-read it.

Having done so he tore it up into shreds, and, putting it into the grate, lit a match and watched it burn until all trace of its terrible contents was destroyed.

"Ay, better far," he muttered under his breath;

"better far to face death now than live to become such another as my father's pen so vividly describes. Not a trace of the vile secret shall be betrayed by me; in life—in death I'll suffer alone. 'Twill be only one more case of accidental drowning, commented upon touchingly, mourned becomingly, and then forgotten. Bah! I'll manage it as decorously as if the whole affair were but a scene upon the stage!"

During breakfast Karl was dimly conscious of his father's keen, penetrating glances ever and anon fixing themselves upon his well-controlled, emotionless countenance. But the pale grave face was indicative of nothing to excite apprehension; it bore no trace of the violent wrestling with despair, and, save an occasional nervous tremor, unnoticed except by his mother, the stoically maintained effort to affect an apathy he was far from feeling convinced the Major that the contents of his letter were, as yet, unknown to his son.

"Sleep has banished your headache, I hope, Karl?" asked Mrs. Maxwell, gently, as she passed him his coffee.

"It is quite gone, thank you, mother. Your prescription was the right one after all," rejoined the lad, naturally, as he began carelessly to balance his teaspoon over his cup.

"Of course it was! A mother always knows what is best for her boy's ailments. Isn't that true, now?"

"I think *you* do, anyhow, mother," smiled Karl, casting a furtive glance at his father as he spoke.

"Yes! I wish, too, all lads were as obedient, grateful patients as you have been."

"Ah, then you really did obey and go to bed?" asked Marjory, after a pause, during which she had devoted herself steadily to her coffee and egg.

"Don't I look as if I had enjoyed a beauty sleep, Marjoram?"

"I'm not sure that you do! But you've got quit of your cobwebs when you call me my Sunday name. I take it as a sign that you're in a good mood and willing to make yourself agreeable when you so honour me!"

"Already I've been doing so. It's the early bird that catches the worm, you know; and I have caught—not a worm—but an invitation for you."

"What a godsend, Karl! Come along, divulge the secret mechanism of your doings, for they are beyond my comprehension, chum mine," laughed Marjory.

"Well, it's only that Fairbairn has asked me to let 'the Miss' know that he is going to his son's and is willing to give her a sail. Does this proposal meet with your approval? for I anticipated it would, and tendered your thanks and duty to your friend of the boat," replied Karl, in as careless a tone as he could assume.

"You judged aright, most worthy brother, and if you continue in as agreeable a frame of mind I'll give you a seat in the stern, and, devoting myself to my oarsman, leave you in peace and quietness! Now, will you join us on these favourable terms?"

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"Very much! You see when Fairbairn is with his son I'll have you to fall back upon to talk to, and to torment in limitation. I only promise to leave you alone during our outward voyage," laughed Marjory, rising from the table as she spoke.

"In my young days children were more respectful to their parents than they seem to be now! Will you ask Marjory to resume her seat, Mrs. Maxwell, until breakfast is over? Her manners and speech are fast becoming those of a tomboy," broke in the Major, harshly, inspired by a spirit of antagonism at the chattering going on around him.

"Oh, father, I forgot! Don't grumble at me, pray, and I'll be as quiet as a mouse until you finish," cried Marjory, her smiles all banished from her face as she once more seated herself opposite her brother, and did her best to maintain a dignified demeanour, whilst her father sipped his coffee with aggravating slowness.

The Major's irascible complaint acted as a wet blanket at the table. Mrs. Maxwell did not encourage further talk between the young people, and, habituated to her husband's irritability, she placidly showed an example of discreet compliance with his wishes until he began leisurely to fold up his napkin and replace it in its ring, when she rose from the table and quietly left the room, followed by Marjory.

"By-the-by, I am going to be busy with some

business papers to-day, Karl, and so anything you may have to say to me must be postponed until some other time. You understand I am not to be disturbed?" said the Major, emphatically, when left alone with his son.

"I have nothing to say, father; I shall not intrude upon your privacy," rejoined the lad, taking up a book and withdrawing from the room as the maid entered to clear the table.

Not always do coming events cast their shadows before them. The common round, the daily task of that long-to-be-remembered day were not interrupted by any warning apprehension of evil hovering over Major Maxwell's household. No timely foreboding voice whispered in urgent, entreating tones to stay the lad from the watery grave he was bent upon seeking. No special intervention of Providence occurred to detain him from his purpose—formed in a moment of frenzical despair, fostered by an innocent train of circumstances which tended unhappily to favour its accomplishment. Neither father, mother, nor sister imagined that the balance of his mind was lost, that the reins of reason were fast escaping his grasp; and, helpless to avert a catastrophe they dreamt not was impending, they unwittingly lent themselves to further his destruction by a heedlessness explicable only by the total unsuspicion of there being need for additional surveillance.

Having fallen before the tempter's power, electing to meet death in preference to carrying the burden of his tainted heritage, Karl passed the

morning hours alone in his room, gloomily concentred in his own thoughts. Dinner over, he once more returned thither, and not until warned by Marjory that Fairbairn had already started for the loch, did he emerge from it, steadily determined to face the fate before which he neither flinched nor quailed.

"Do come along, old chum!" urged Marjory, as, standing upon the doorstep a few minutes later, her brother hesitated for a second ere following her down the avenue.

"I've forgotten something; just go on and I'll make up on you," replied Karl, re-entering the house and going straight to the drawing-room, in which he knew Mrs. Maxwell was taking her after-dinner siesta.

"I'm going with Marjory for a row on the loch, mother; you don't object?" he asked, smiling curiously as he spoke.

"Not if you promise to be careful, dear. You will keep out of danger and take care of Marjory, won't you?"

"Of course! Marjoram will be all right with me, mother. But I'm defrauding you of your forty winks, am I not?"

"Not at all! Bring yourself and Marjory safely home to tea, and tell Fairbairn to take great care of both my chicks."

"Yes! I'll tell him; though, perhaps, he will think 'the chicks' are old enough to look after themselves," rejoined Karl, turning his eyes yearningly upon his mother's face.

"Marjory will be apt to scold if you keep her waiting too long—you know what a little drum-major she can be at times—therefore make haste after her if you would escape a lecture! And now, ta-ta for the present, dear lad," said Mrs. Maxwell, lightly.

"Poor Marjoram! Yes! I must really run. But first give me a kiss, mother," said Karl, bending over the couch and affectionately pressing his mother's lips, and then lingering still by her side as if unable to tear himself away.

"Fond, foolish boy!" softly whispered Mrs. Maxwell, fixing her eyes upon the grave inscrutable face beside her, and gently stroking the lad's hand.

"I'm off at last then, mother, so *Leben Sie wohl auf Wiedersehen*," after a pause answered Karl, with a strange pathetic droop about his mouth, uncommented upon at the moment, but recalled by Mrs. Maxwell with wondering, bitter feelings of regret a few short hours afterwards.

"I thought you were never coming, Karl! What in the world detained you?" inquired Marjory, on being joined by her brother a second or two later.

"Oh! Charon will wait for his passengers, dear. I'm sorry, though, for keeping you waiting," rejoined Karl, gravely.

A few minutes' walk brought the brother and sister to the loch-side, where Fairbairn, leisurely pocketing his pipe, greeted them with one of his broadest smiles; and, assuring Karl as he boarded the boat after him that "the Miss is a'most as guid

as mysel' at rowing," promptly handed Marjory an oar; then, deftly pushing off from the shore, he was soon giving all his attention to her even flow of bantering small talk.

"Yer brither wad maybe like to hae a pull o' the oars, Miss?" he asked, during a lull in the conversation, which gave him an opportunity of observing the lad's pre-occupied, quiet demeanour, which formed so striking a contrast to his sister's merriment.

"Would you like to row a little, Karl? Fairbairn is asking," inquired Marjory.

"By-and-by, perhaps! but I'm quite content to sit your passenger until we land our ferryman, then I'll try my 'prentice hand while he's gone," rejoined Karl, forcing a smile to his pale grave face—so pale, so set was it that Marjory started, and resting her oars in the rowlocks demanded eagerly if he were feeling ill.

"Not at all! I'm enjoying the sail immensely," he answered, rousing himself from his lethargy, and dipping a hand in the clear rippleless water as he spoke.

"Then you must be solving some queer knotty problem, old chap! you seem quite absorbed in a world of your own."

"I was never gifted with such spirits as yours; but you have guessed not far astray, for a problem was simmering in my head, Marjoram."

"Solve it quickly then, and be done with it. I hate a chum of mine to be for ever falling into brown studies; they are so closely allied to fits of

the blues," Marjory laughed, as she began again to dip her oars.

"What a strange, wayward girl you are, Marjoram!"

"Very! quite a hoyden, but withal a lovable one, Karl! Am I not, now, spite of my folly?"

"Indeed you are, Marjory—does that please you?"

"Yes! I knew you were agreeably inclined to-day, *mon ami.*"

A smile stole over the young, clouded face, which, as Marjory resumed her attentions to Fairbairn, again relapsed into its former gravity. And not until the old man had left the boat to visit his son, who lived in a little thatched cottage a short distance from the landing-place, did Karl force himself into an assumption of that gaiety he was far from feeling.

As Fairbairn jumped from the boat, Marjory nimbly followed him, and, Karl showing no inclination to leave it, she stood laughing and talking for a few minutes on the pebbly shore. But seeing him still indisposed to move, she was about to resume her seat beside him, when one of old Fairbairn's grandchildren emerged from the cottage, and came running down the path, until, overcome by a sudden fit of shyness, he halted, uncertain whether to advance or retreat.

The bright-eyed, flaxen-haired boy was not unknown to Marjory; and she was soon beside him, coaxing him onwards by the promise of a sail in 'Grand-dad's boat.' Listening to his baby prattle,

she was all oblivious of the fact that Karl had seized the opportunity of her absence and was fast rowing from the shore. On discovering what had happened, she signalled for him to return, shouting, as she did so, that she wished the boy to have a sail; while, totally unapprehensive of danger, she continued by the child's side, amused by his easily-won friendliness towards herself.

"Karl! Karl! Do make haste and come back for me!" she cried after a time, growing impatient at her brother's obstinate heedlessness of her wishes, and also desirous of gratifying her playmate by giving him the promised sail.

The boat had reached mid-water; the oars were in the rowlocks. The youth, sitting erect and listless, turned at the sound of his name and slowly waved his handkerchief. Then, moved by some vein of pity for his sister, wishful of getting her removed from the spot ere taking his desperate plunge, he rose and shouted hoarsely: "Take back the child, Marjory! Take him to his mother, and tell Fairbairn to come away. It 's time to be going home now. Go at once, Marjoram! Marjoram! Marjoram!"

Karl's voice rang out the favourite name in touching, loving accents, which Marjory could never forget. Something in its wailing repetition startled and aroused her to the necessity for speed; and, stretching out her hands, she shouted back, as her heart beat fast and her limbs trembled beneath her: "Yes! yes! I 'm going for Fairbairn. Try and row for the shore, Karl!" and seizing the child's

hand, she ran breathlessly up the hilly path, a foreboding of approaching evil causing her ever and anon to turn her head in the direction of the boat, which in its stillness seemed anchored to the spot.

The few minutes it took Marjory to reach the cottage seemed an eternity to her. Panting for breath she entered it, and, taking hold of the old man sitting by the fireside, gasped forth her fears for her brother's safety.

"He must be ill, Fairbairn, and unable to manage the boat! Come! oh, come quickly!"

"He 'll jist be wanting to gie ye a bit fricht, Miss; dinna tak' on sae bad, like a wumman!" rejoined the astonished servant, kindly, as he allowed himself to be dragged forth by the trembling girl, who clung to him in speechless, nameless dread.

Accompanied by Fairbairn, his son, and daughter-in-law, Marjory, half-wild with fear, rounded the corner which hid the loch from view; and, pale as death, stood straining her eyes for a glimpse of her brother.

But a second later a loud and terrible shriek rent the air, as she caught sight of an upturned boat; and, fixing her awe-stricken face upon those beside her, she understood why she was hurriedly thrust into Mrs. Fairbairn's arms, and why the younger man, casting his coat from him, ran madly to the shore and boldly plunged into the cruel, silent loch, which gave forth no warning voice as Karl sought to hide his misery and his pain

beneath its waves but a few short moments before.

And with the knowledge came a blessed cessation of consciousness as Mrs. Fairbairn wound her rough, kind arms about her, and gently bore her back to the cottage.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A RUDE AWAKENING.

IN the dusk of the September evening rough but kindly hands carried the lifeless body of Karl Maxwell to Earlsgrange. In the old-fashioned room which had witnessed his agony of but a few hours before, the willing neighbours laid their burden down, and, with bated breath, expressed their sympathy with the Major and his wife; then, renewing their offers of assistance, should such be required, they, with muffled tread and grief-bowed heads, left the dead alone with the father they doubted not was heart-broken by his loss.

In the room adjoining Marjory lay, happily unconscious of all that was going on.

She had been brought home fully believing that the restoratives applied to her brother had proved successful; and, relieved from the first stunning fears she had felt for his safety, she lay placidly asleep, her tear-stained face still bearing unmistakable tokens of the anguish through which she had passed. Mrs. Maxwell, pale and worn, dreading

the awakening which must make her acquainted with the truth, bent over her sleeping child and gently breathed a prayer for help to enable her to bear up under the blow which had fallen so suddenly upon her. Then, the slumberer's repose continuing undisturbed, she quietly quitted the room and sought that in which Karl lay in his last deep sleep.

Softly closing the door, she knelt by the bedside, and spent some minutes in silent prayer.

The tragic suddenness with which the shock had overwhelmed her had in a manner rendered her incapable of comprehending how the fatality had occurred. That the messenger, who had been hastily despatched to break the news, had spoken of it as due to recklessness on Karl's part, she vaguely seemed to remember. But, even as she mused, her eyes ever and again seeking the pale young face at rest for ever, a trembling, nameless dread that he had premeditated the act took possession of her; and she seemed intuitively to divine that the affectionate leave-taking of a few hours ago had been intended as a final one. He had wooed death, and was now

> "Beyond the farewell and the greeting,
> Beyond this pulse's fever beating."

"Poor Karl! Poor, sensitive, death-loving lad! May God in Heaven deal mercifully with you and forgive!" murmured Mrs. Maxwell as she imprinted a kiss upon the cold, beautiful brow, and went in search of her husband.

Listening to Fairbairn's account of what had happened, Major Maxwell was seated in his study vainly trying to reassure the faithful servant that, so far as he could understand, he was innocent of blame with regard to the sad occurrence of that day. The old man, however, could not rid himself of the idea that he was responsible for the calamity, and tears dimmed his honest, kindly eyes as he stood reiterating his regrets at having left the boat in charge of the young people.

"Ye canna blame me mair than I dae mysel'," he said, turning to Mrs. Maxwell as she entered the room. "Say what ye wull tae me, mem, it canna be waur than I merit; and I've jist been telling the Major a' aboot it."

"But I do not know if you really are to blame, Fairbairn; I do not understand it quite yet. And how did Karl not——"

"The boat capsized, my dear. Wasn't that it, Fairbairn?" hurriedly interrupted the Major, as he led his wife to the sofa and softly urged her to compose herself, whispering in her ear, as he wrapped a shawl closely about her.

"Ay, ay, sir, a jerky movement on Maister Karl's pairt maun hae dune it, an' a meenit aifter he wad be struggling i' the water; an' me no there tae see't! But, eh Major! could he but hae swam, I wadna hae had this sair job the nicht, for ae stroke or twa wad hae brought him tae the shore. The bonnie, hapless chield! my very heart gangs oot tae him; an' I'll ne'er forgi'e mysel' for leaving him an' Miss wi' my boat," sobbed the old servant

as he neared the door, and was about to withdraw.

"It 's a heavy stroke and a sore dispensation of Providence, my poor fellow, but until we know more thoroughly what led to the accident we shall not blame you. Miss Maxwell and her brother had been in the habit of rowing over the loch with you, I believe?" inquired the Major.

"Ay, that they were! But though Miss could row, and liket the job, I dinna mind o' Maister Karl ever lending a haund. He jist liket tae sit quate, an' whiles he wad hae a bit buik wi' him. He was aye unco quate by what the Miss was. An' I 'm wae, real wae, that I e'er askit him tae gang wi' me the day. I blame mysel' for 't a', though God kens I meant nae ill."

"Charles, will you ask him how it came about—that Karl did not try——"

"Yes! yes! I 'll explain it all presently. Fairbairn is now going to Selsdene; there is much to arrange you know, my dear," responded the Major, hastily giving the man some written directions and recapitulating his former orders.

Left alone with his wife, Major Maxwell rapidly explained, in so far as he could, the views taken by their neighbours and others of the accident which had deprived them of their son.

"They and Fairbairn have considerably simplified the most serious difficulty connected with it, for they have assured me that a tyro in swimming could have gained the shore. Hence they conclude that he could not swim——"

"But he was an expert in swimming, Charles! Didn't you tell them?" interrupted Mrs. Maxwell, with an impatient nervous movement of her hands, as she turned her questioning eyes upon her husband.

"I did not! Had I done so it would have led to unnecessary explanations, and would probably have damaged my remaining child—unless I had given details of what I would fain be saved from. You follow my motives?"

"Then you believe that——"

"I believe that the act was premeditated, or that a moment's madness prompted the deed. It is surely well to draw a curtain over the past, Liza. We only suspect, we do not definitely know. To explain is unnecessary—the boy was accidentally drowned, and the neighbours aver that, because he was drowned, therefore he could not swim. A due regard to the welfare of others is necessary; you will, therefore, adopt the theory of the catastrophe presented, in all innocence, to us by the men who lent their aid in recovering the body."

"Charles! Charles! have you no grain of pity for the boy? I am certain he premeditated the act, for never before did he take leave of me as he did to-day."

"He may have done so; in which case he must have preferred immediate dissolution to the death-in-life existence to which he was doomed."

"Then he knew?"

"He did."

"But not everything—not all—Charles?"

"He knew everything, Liza. He gave me no peace until I explained all to him. He took up the question of heredity, and goaded me to tell him; and this, I fear, is the use to which he has put the knowledge."

"It was cruel, Charles, and more than flesh and blood could stand. You have sent your son to his grave by the knowledge," said Mrs. Maxwell, bitterly.

"And saved him years of incarceration in a madhouse, most probably," rejoined the Major under his breath. "If you keep that in view, I think it will mitigate your sorrow, and enable you to bear calmly what has occurred. Our child will believe what the outside world does. We need not take it, or her, into our confidence. Let a veil be drawn over that which is now irremediable."

"Irremediable indeed, but how full of regret, Charles!" softly murmured Mrs. Maxwell, as her tear-dimmed eyes sought the hard, set countenance of her husband, who, having extended but little kindness to the youth in his lifetime, was fain now to regard his death as a blessed deliverance.

The tragic event had cast a gloom over the neighbourhood, which increased a few days later when it was rumoured that serious fears were entertained for the Major's remaining child. The deception practised upon Marjory had been followed by a keen and terrible awakening. And not until she had bent over and kissed the still, cold form of him whose plaintive death-cry: "Marjoram! Marjoram! Marjoram!" kept ringing in her ears,

did she seem fully to comprehend the completeness of the separation a few short hours had wrought. Her first wild realization of it was piteous and crushing to witness, and seemed even to strike a gentler, tenderer chord in her father's heart, as he hung over his girl's couch and heard the wailing, bitter lament she uttered for the brother who, fearful of a worse fate overtaking him, had sought and found a remedy for his pain in the cold, silent waters of Loch Kaltree.

A touching, pathetic paragraph which appeared in the local journal of the following day was, nevertheless, read by the Major with grateful feelings of approval and satisfaction. For, by a fortunate train of propitious circumstances, Karl's death was denuded of any tell-tale clue to point to the fatality being other than purely accidental; and the fact of its being so graphically described in the paper lying by his side was an incalculable relief to the father, who shuddered as he thought of what he might have been called upon to disclose had the unhappy lad failed in his efforts to honour 'the respectabilities.'

A week later Karl's remains were laid in the picturesque, rural churchyard of Selsdene; and by-and-by a simple granite tombstone, erected to his memory, told how the only son of Major Charles Maxwell, *ætat* XXI., had been accidentally drowned in Loch Kaltree, on the 23rd of September, 18—.

This last duty accomplished, the household at Earlsgrange relapsed into their former habits of

seclusion. And slowly Marjory allowed herself to be nursed back to health and strength; but the merry smiles and joyous, ringing laughter of other days refused to return, for all too soon had she fulfilled the promise given satirically in response to her father's frequent chidings, and had 'settled down.' The old elf-like, mischief-loving sprightliness had vanished, and in its place had come a dull, apathetic bearing, which not a little dismayed Mrs. Maxwell and the Major, as they mused over the changed countenance and demeanour of their child.

But the young, bright spirit had been wounded, and many, many months were needed to woo back the sunny smiles to the sweet face, whose tell-tale sadness gave such palpable tokens of the love Marjory had borne the brother whose image seemed indelibly graven on her heart.

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Fate interposed, and unmistakably pointed the path wherein she would have him to tread.

In clerical circles Staneridge enjoyed a good reputation, for more than one city clergyman could look back upon the first happy days of his ministry passed amid the quiet seclusion of the sea-side parish which had decided in favour of Thomas Oxlade.

The young minister entered upon his charge brimful of enthusiasm for every good work; and, as the weeks and months glided on, they gave ample token of his fitness for the position he occupied, and likewise of the wisdom of his parishioners' choice. Though the village cannot properly be described as a fashionable resort, it yet possessed sufficient attractions to induce a limited number of visitors annually to tarry for a season amidst its verdurous, sylvan surroundings; and year after year the snowy white houses facing the long stretch of silver sand, and overlooking the placid, shining Clyde, beyond which, away to the west, rose the everlasting hills, were occupied by the pleasure-seekers, over whom Staneridge never ceased to exercise its picturesque fascination. But dwellings less prominent than these homely abodes had also arisen in the neighbourhood, for not a few of its admirers had built for themselves and their families more ambitious residences, which, dappling the nearer heights, peeped forth from amidst the dark firs and tender-hued birches, whose diversity of foliage lent additional beauty to the landscape.

At the time of Tom Oxlade's settlement in the parish the steam-boat formed the only means of communication with the Western metropolis; and there was more than one worthy in the congregation who had never heard the screech of the railway whistle, and to whom its possible invasion was regarded as a calamity to be dreaded—a commodity which, as unknown to their fathers, had better remain unheard by their sons. Indeed, the exquisite calm of Tom's new home was admirably adapted to his taste for a quiet and thoughtful life. Undisturbed by the noise, the keen competitive struggle of our hurrying, bustling age, he considered himself fortunate in being settled in the midst of the rural flock to whom, in the leisurely pursuit of their daily avocations, the worship of the God of Getting-on was an unknown cult, and the modern craze for independence of life and action unheard-of, undreamt-of agitations.

The church and manse of Staneridge were situated but a short distance from the recently-erected wooden pier, and seemed as beacons set upon a hill, so conspicuously did they strike the eye of the traveller as the steamer, throbbing its way on its daily voyage, quickly bore him past. A comfortable two-storied house, the manse, from its lofty site, commanded many charming panoramic views. Nor, throughout life, could Tom ever speak without emotion of the splendours of the sunsets, the wondrous play of colour, the magical shifting of shadow, the protean charm of landscape and sky, witnessed from the study windows. The idyllic

glamour of youth was casting its wand over the home of the hard-working, self-denying student of former days, and on entering upon the labours of his new sphere Tom felt emboldened to thank God and take courage.

But an interval of three years lay between the date of the tutorial engagement with Mr. Warwick's son and that of Tom Oxlade's settlement at Staneridge. The reading tour of those early days had proved the stepping-stone to an intimacy between the young men which was not allowed to terminate with the holiday spent at Fort-William. Mr. Warwick had been singularly gratified by the results of Tom's coaching, as well as by the wisely-regulated régime exercised over his charge. For so judiciously had the young tutor blended a goodly amount of pleasure with the daily portion of necessary study that, long ere the time for separation came round, he had completely won the heart of his pupil; and, this effected, the lad awoke from the torpidity which had at times proved such a drag upon his progress, and exerted his mental powers to the utmost in order to gain the approval of the teacher whose love of sports and other kindred pursuits so exactly coincided with his own tastes. The dreaded examination was got through, and, as Tom once again returned to his airily situated lodgings in a humble Edinburgh street, Reginald Warwick took up his residence at Merton College, Oxford.

But the friendship thus begun was maintained and cemented by a constant interchange of letters

during the terms, and by frequent reunions when opportunity offered in the vacation.

It had sometimes happened, however, that the hard-working divinity student would fain have declined Mr. and Mrs. Warwick's kindly invitations to their West End residence. But the slightest symptom of his fighting shy of these was, as a rule, so quickly detected by Reginald, that it became well-nigh impossible to defeat his watchfulness; and often did Tom laughingly assure his friend that, should he ever be joined to the rank of "stickit ministers," the credit would be laid entirely upon his shoulders, if he persisted in beguiling him away from the grinding hours of solitary study that were essential to equip a student for making a decent appearance before his Professors.

Mr. Warwick was a widower, with an only son and daughter, and his widowed mother kept house for him, devoting her every energy to make it as bright and cheerful a home as once upon a time she had made her husband's. To disseminate happiness around her seemed to the careful observer of her life and actions to be the very *raison d'être* of her existence. She loved to encourage her grandchildren's friends to find a friend in her. And that her endeavours to win their affections met with the reward they merited, was amply testified by the many young people residing in Edinburgh for educational or other purposes, whose confidant and adviser she became.

One of these was her grand-daughter Violet's fellow-student, Marjory Maxwell. Both girls were

gifted with considerable artistic talent; and the similarity of their tastes and the sameness of their aims caused the liking each felt for the other rapidly to ripen into an attachment which the flight of time but deepened and strengthened. The interruption of intercourse brought about by Marjory's residence at Earlsgrange had been an unfailing source of regret to Violet. For not the bulkiest, warmest epistle could, she declared, ever atone to her for the loss of the *viva voce* she loved, and upon which no small quota of her daily happiness depended.

Her friend's grief for her brother had been shared by Violet; and when, some months after the accident, Marjory returned to Edinburgh and began once again to pursue her studies, Violet enthusiastically welcomed her back, notwithstanding the confession, made to her grandmother, that it was no longer the bright, joyous, laughter-loving companion of bygone days she had recovered, but another, an older, and a saddened comrade. Yet the kind, sympathetic reception warm-hearted Mrs. Warwick extended to her grandchild's favourite did much to endear the old lady to the pale, spiritless girl, who now became an almost constant visitor at —— Crescent. And by-and-by, as the weeks glided into months, and summer gave place to autumn, the pleasant change of environment, combined with the bright, wholesome atmosphere pervading Mr. Warwick's household, did much to free Marjory from the grief-laden memories of the past. Nor was Mrs. Maxwell slow to recognise

the beneficial effects the renewal of youthful companionship and intercourse had upon her child.

Upon several occasions Marjory had been present when Mr. Warwick was expressing his gratification at the strides his son had made in his studies since his acquaintance with the divinity student who had coached him for matriculation at Oxford. Sometimes, too, she had witnessed Reginald's ill-concealed disappointment at the non-appearance of a certain friend. The name, however, if mentioned in her presence, must have entirely escaped her memory; for not until she found herself being introduced to him upon one of Mrs. Warwick's musical evenings, did she discover Reginald's highly-esteemed friend to be none other than young Mr. Oxlade from Denetap.

Recognition, though fraught with saddening memories of the old life at Earlsgrange, and of a grave in the quiet little churchyard of Selsdene, was not devoid of a pleasurable element, and a stray, long-absent light shone in Marjory's blue eyes as, on her return home that evening, she sat on a low seat by her mother's knee, and told of the strange renewal of acquaintance with the young man who had assisted her in her distress on that bygone summer day on the banks of Loch Kaltree.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE REWARD OF DILIGENCE.

IT had been with feelings of unfeigned relief that Mrs. Maxwell had once again taken up her residence in Edinburgh.

The spring following Karl's death a cheaply-rented furnished house in a third-rate street was fixed upon by the Major as an abode likely to meet the requirements of himself and family during the short period he hoped to remain in the metropolis. To further his daughter's interests, and permit of her resuming her studies under the same Professor as formerly, were the chief inducements that led to his abandoning his predilection for a renewal of the migratory life which was still full of fascination for him. But the decision to which he came, and the paternal sense of duty on which he now prided himself might never have bloomed into practice but for his wife's frequently urged entreaties to afford Marjory the opportunity of continuing her studies in the city.

If these were prosecuted with diligence, she

expected the girl would, in the fulness of time, be furnished not only with a congenial, but likewise with a profitable occupation, and one, besides, which would divert her thoughts from brooding over the sorrow that had taken so firm a hold of her mind.

As Mrs. Maxwell had anticipated, this argument for Marjory's welfare was conclusive, for, notwithstanding her father's many foibles and imperfections, there lay, under his outward guise of severity and frigid formality, a deep, if undemonstrative, affection for his remaining child. And for her sake he consented to forego his wishes for a period, resolving, however, that as soon as feasible he would resume the nomadic life primarily renounced for the purpose of devoting himself to his son's education.

Settled in Edinburgh, Marjory determined that her mother's hopes on her account should become realities. She worked industriously, and though she had in a measure lost the whole desire for the silver lining to her purse which she and Karl had been wont to laugh over in the bygone days, the announcement of the sale of her two landscapes exhibiting on the walls of the Scottish Academy sent a throb of joy through the heart of the young artist. Her happiness, indeed, was complete on learning that these specimens of her work had been deemed worthy not only of admittance but that Fate had decreed that the tangible reward of merit should be hers as well as the honour implied in having had her pictures accepted for exhibition.

"Three years' hard work have at last brought

their reward. You feel satisfied, I trust, with your innings, Marjory?" inquired the Major, with an approving look at his daughter's animated countenance.

"Yes! I'm proud of my first earnings. I'd like to know, though, who bought the pictures," she answered, smiling.

Once upon a time Marjory's joy would have taken a more boisterous form; but the three years which had passed over her head had calmed her impetuosity, had sobered and wrought a change upon her feelings.

"Rest assured, dear, it's someone who appreciates good work: both are perfect gems. I don't wonder they went together," said Mrs. Maxwell, softly patting the little hand which lay within her reach.

"All the same, mother, I hope no one has gone and bought them for the sake of encouraging me. Violet knows how I wish my work to stand or fall on its own merits, otherwise I might have suspected Mr. Warwick of a benevolent deed."

"What nonsense you are talking, Marjory. You expose wares for sale, and when they go off you begin to wonder if the purchaser has bought them for the sake of encouraging you. The world is not quite so full of good Samaritans, I assure you, child. I wish it were!"

"Do you, father?"

"I tell you your pictures sold because the purchaser admired them; and, being in a position to gratify his tastes, he put his hand in his pocket and drew forth the *quid pro quo* demanded by the

seller. That was the beginning and end of the transaction, and I hope it is but the precursor of many more, Marjory."

"It's a pleasant transaction, dad! I hope it may be. All the same, though, I'd like to know where 'Ebb-tide at Dawn' and 'Gathering Cockles' are bound for," laughed Marjory, her curiosity unabated by her father's matter-of-fact view of her success.

"Your desire will not be ungratified, dearie; it's quite natural you should feel interested in the future destination of your companion pictures, but there is no immediate haste," rejoined Mrs. Maxwell, mildly elated by her child's good fortune.

"Well, I'll try to possess my soul in patience, mother," said Marjory, her face rippling over with smiles as she rose from the breakfast-table. "Meanwhile, I'm off to my work; but my thoughts are with the good Samaritan whose discriminating eye, you tell me, father, has detected merit in my pictures."

"Depend upon it, Marjory, the good Samaritan is better employed, and has not a thought to spare for——"

"For the artist he has made a happy woman, father. That is how you were going to conclude; isn't it?" cried Marjory, merrily, as she tripped lightly from the room.

* * * * *

That same morning the Rev. Thomas Oxlade, of Staneridge, sat so unconscionably long over breakfast that his housekeeper, impatient at the

delay, ventured to put her head in at her master's door to inquire if he had forgotten to ring, and if she might clear the table.

The Rev. Thomas was by no means inclined to linger over meals. But this morning his coffee and fish stood almost untouched whilst he sat musing over the paper he held in his hand, his eyes resting on the list of Academy sales. A trifling enough paragraph indeed to absorb the attention of the minister of Staneridge would have been the verdict of worthy, sensible Mrs. Clayson, had she known. But, fortunately for the upholding of the lofty ideal she had formed of the young minister, the kindly, warm-hearted housekeeper merely concluded that her master was intent upon some new political development, and had therefore become oblivious of the steaming coffee and daintily-cooked fish, which, in her opinion, were far more deserving of his attention than the reports of all the debates and speeches of the House of Commons strung together.

Mrs. Clayson's wisdom, however, was great; and she knew full well that, even as her spectacles could not be made to fit the world at large, so it was equally a feat beyond her powers to impress upon Mr. Oxlade that the morning's paper could not suffer by waiting, whilst his breakfast would, and accordingly, with a well-bred apology for disturbing him, she quietly withdrew, a smile hovering about her mouth as she noiselessly closed the door.

Thus gently reminded of the flight of time, the Rev. Thomas Oxlade hastily swallowed the remnants of the lukewarm breakfast; and then,

*Courant* in hand, retired to his study, while his thoughts bounded unchecked to a sparsely-furnished dining-room in an old-fashioned Edinburgh street where imagination showed him a girl's sweet, yet pensive, face wreathed in smiles; let him hear her melodious laughter and bantering small-talk, her mother's quietly expressed congratulations, and her father's frigid, well-meaning comments. And, by dint of straining his ears to the utmost limit, he imagined he heard her wondering who had bought the twin landscapes which were now his own.

Having pictured the scene so far to his satisfaction, the Rev. Thomas rose from his seat and made a careful inspection of his study walls.

Opposite the fireplace stood a massive oak bookcase, which, from its height, debarred him from further scrutiny of that side of the room for the purpose he had in view—the spaces on either side of the window would have suited, but Marjory's work must hang in better light, where he, the owner, would have them ever in sight. The Rev. Thomas consequently negatived that position at once. The wall facing the window was better, but that would entail his turning his back upon that which he wished to face. Over the fireplace? Yes, that must be the place. But, unfortunately, that most desirable space was occupied by the gifts of a well-meaning parishioner. The 'Duke of Wellington' hung in the centre, supported on either side by scenes from the 'Cottar's Saturday Night.'

Never before had the minister of Staneridge harboured any feeling of ingratitude for any of

the tokens of goodwill and friendship bestowed upon him in his new home. But at that moment, it is feared, the generous donor, the amiable beautifier of his pastor's study, suffered some rough usage in the young clergyman's thoughts, as, throwing himself into his easy chair, he fixed his eyes, with feelings far removed from admiration or satisfaction, upon the engravings which now struck him as being so offensively out of place.

To arrange his new purchases alongside of others was not to be thought of; and so the perplexed parson sat pondering the question till he arrived at a happy solution of the difficulty, which was simply that the wall over the fireplace must be left vacant that very day. For assuredly it would seem a less heinous offence in the eyes of his worthy, respected elder to leave the original space free for some weeks, than to let his gifts hang as they were, and then allow them to be suddenly supplanted by fresh importations, when these should reach him.

The donor had hung the 'Duke' with his own hands, and was, besides, an almost weekly visitor at the Manse. It therefore behoved the minister to tread warily, for, if a brother offended is hard to be won, he had been warned by a wise old churchman that the feelings of an elder are, at the best, but brittle ware.

Having in his own mind settled this important question, the minister forthwith summoned Mrs. Clayson to his assistance; and, after not a little persuasive argumentation, the lesser engravings were relegated to spaces on either side of the

window, whilst the larger one was hung prominently opposite to it. But the arrangement, though it brought a bright smile of satisfaction to the minister's face, did not altogether meet with the approval of the worthy housekeeper, whose critical eye disliked exceedingly the bareness and lack of decoration over the mantel-shelf.

"It but shows the want of pictures all the more, sir, to leave that wall empty," she ventured to suggest when appealed to for an opinion.

"You think so, Mrs. Clayson? But if that is so, the others are better clothed; and the greater amount of space between them heightens the artistic effect of the room to my eye, at least," rejoined the Rev. Thomas, inwardly agreeing with the good taste expressed by his housekeeper, but by no means inclined to inform her that the 'bareness' complained of was destined to be but a temporary defect.

"I don't know, sir, I'm sure; but whatever effect the alteration makes, I can't pretend to like the want over there—it just seems as if something was forgotten about it," said Mrs. Clayson, meekly, as she took a parting glance at the offending space, ere withdrawing from the study.

"You are quite right, good Mrs. Clayson, there is a want, and a great one, in the Manse, but that will by-and-by be remedied when—ah, I humbly hope—a certain fair lady hears a secret your master has carried about in his breast for many a long day," mused the minister, smiling, as he slowly, meditatively began to fill his pipe, whilst,

like a flash of lightning, his mental vision conjured up a series of dissolving views in which the actors throughout the shifting scenes were always himself and Marjory Maxwell.

Time, opposition, and distance were bridged as the Rev. Thomas Oxlade sat pondering over the fondly-cherished hours spent with Marjory during his final student days. He recalled the many happy evenings he had passed with her at Mrs. Warwick's, the few ceremonious visits he had paid her at her own home, when it needed no clearness of vision to discover her father's unwillingness to any intimacy being formed between himself and the household.

Certainly the one prominent feature in the minister's horizon that day was Marjory. Nor did the remembrance of her father's lack of cordiality dim the golden gladness that welled up within him as he sat picturing to himself the fair black-robed girl he hoped to bring home to the Manse as soon as the Major's consent to his suit could be won.

That this preliminary step had still to be got through was alone due to the Rev. Thomas's desire to be in possession of a church and manse ere venturing to approach Major Maxwell on a subject he could not help suspecting would require considerable tact and delicate handling, if the wished-for approval were to be gained.

## CHAPTER XII.

### HAPPY LOVE.

A WEEK later the Rev. Thomas Oxlade was hurriedly wending his way from his hotel in George Street to the quiet old-fashioned house in which lived Major Maxwell.

He had arrived in Edinburgh the previous evening, determined to plead his suit in person; but though his hopes ran high, there now and again arose a flickering dread of opposition—a fear that, reduced in circumstances as the Major was, he still might wish his daughter to secure wealth and position with the husband of her choice. Were this to be so, would Marjory stifle the love he knew she bore him, and prove herself the puppet to a father's threats? or, would she be faithful and true to the dictates of her own heart?—were the questions that ever and anon obtruded themselves upon the mind of the young divine as he walked quickly along the busy streets of the fair Scottish metropolis, which, in the gay bustle of the bright April day, presented so keen a contrast to the quiet, still beauty he had left behind at Staneridge.

Reaching the west end of Princes Street the Rev. Thomas was awaiting the exodus of several lady passengers from the car which he proposed mounting, when he felt his arm lightly touched by the last of these as she nimbly alighted, while a familiar voice broke upon his ears, as Marjory smilingly exclaimed, "Were you going to cut me, Mr. Oxlade?"

Beaming from her sweet face was the love-light which could not be concealed; nor did doubt or fear again find place in the minister's breast, as, grasping the little gloved hand, he drew it within his arm, and forthwith led its owner to the footpath, whilst the car conductor, giving the signal to proceed, cast a glance of withering scorn at the unconscious culprit who had been so heedlessly detaining him.

"Oh, Mr. Oxlade, you have lost it!" cried Marjory, trying to release her hand from its resting-place, as she suddenly realized that her companion was moving exactly in the opposite direction to that he had intended.

"Yes! and have found you instead!"

"But you mustn't let me keep you from your engagements. Another car will be here presently. Will you take it?"

"I think not; come! take a stroll through the gardens with me. You have time to spare, and so have I, Marjory!" replied Tom Oxlade, opening a gate of the West Princes Street Gardens as he spoke.

A slight rosy flush mounted to Marjory's face.

It was the first time her lover had called her by her Christian name, and a subtle something in its pronunciation warned her that his errand to Edinburgh was to break the long silence of suspense; that at last the love which had been cherished in secret was to be declared. Then a wondrous contentment filled Marjory's heart, as, raising no dissentient voice, she allowed herself to be led within the gardens chosen by her lover as the scene for his rehearsal of that old old story, which neither time nor space can ever rob of its fascinating freshness, which no repetition can ever dull.

"Can you guess what has brought me to town? Do you know where I was going when we met?" asked the Rev. Thomas, after a silent walk of a few minutes.

"You were going south, of course, when I hindered your progress, and I can guess it was to meet some friends," rejoined Marjory, smiling as she spoke.

"I was going to seek you, Marjory! You need not be surprised to hear that. You knew I would seek you one day, didn't you? Well, dearest, that day has dawned; and I have come to say what I dared not until the possessor of a kirk and a manse. Let me say it here and now. I love you, Marjory! I want you for my wife! What answer am I to take away with me, dearest?"

But though Marjory's heart beat with the great joy which had come to her, her lips were silent. And, but for a certain tell-tale light in the deep blue eyes which for a moment met his own, the

Rev. Thomas might have concluded he had come too late to plead his suit.

"You must give me an answer, dearest," he whispered softly, tightening his hold of the little hand he was so eager to win.

"Do you know I loved you from that far-away day when I met you at Loch Kaltree? Do you know I have smothered my love on account of your father's pronounced views as to the intolerable pretensions of the sons of the peasantry, and that I vowed to keep silence until I had a home to offer my wife? It was a risky thing to do, darling, but I felt that you understood how I dared not speak, and I also seemed to know that I was not altogether distasteful to you; that you could forgive my humble birth. Have I been mistaken, dearest?" urged the stalwart, handsome minister of Staneridge, in deep and tremulous tones.

The mention of her father's dogmatic, old-fashioned views regarding caste and station roused Marjory into speech. Her shyness forsook her; and it was with a proud, new-born happiness irradiating her sweet, flushed face, that she turned her head, and, meeting her lover's gaze, answered quickly, "You were not mistaken! My father's views are altogether wrong. They cannot affect you. You didn't apply them to yourself, surely?"

"I did, Marjory! Can you love and give yourself to a man who has pushed his way in the world, who owes his present position to his own exertions, whose forebears could boast of no inheritance save that of honest toil for daily bread; to one whose

arrogant pretensions have brought him here to say that he loves you and wishes you to tread life's pathway by his side? What is your answer, dearest? Can you give yourself to me?"

"I can—I will," unhesitatingly rejoined Marjory, a rosy tint suffusing her face, and a wondrously beautiful smile rippling upon her lips as she put both her hands into her lover's, and allowed him to raise them to his lips and kiss them again and again.

To what other extravagant demonstration of his happiness the minister of Staneridge might have been carried, was a second later stopped short by the recollection of his public surroundings. A couple of staid, elderly gentlemen, as they strolled past the quiet nook selected by the lovers, could so ill conceal their amusement that their slight titter aroused Marjory's sense of the ludicrous, and she blushingly withdrew her hands, as the remark of one of the worthies—"The old, old story! I did just the same myself thirty years ago"—fell upon her ears.

Tom laughed. "I daresay these old chaps are wishing us well, and heaping blessings upon our heads," he murmured. "And are you not happy to think, darling, that they have so truly interpreted Love's young dream as to cause the hands of time to roll back thirty years? Their Eden, though, must have been vastly inferior to mine!"

"Not necessarily! perhaps they too are thinking no Eden could ever equal their own. And who is

to decide?" said Marjory, speaking slowly, as if the magnitude of the problem required reflection deep and profound, ere venturing to scatter the mists in which it seemed wrapped.

"The latest arrivals, of course!" replied Tom readily. "Ah, Marjory! if you only knew how I sometimes dreaded my silence would lose me my wife. It was a rash vow I took; and its consequences might have been to make me the most miserable, instead of the happiest, mortal upon earth."

"Hush! I sometimes thought that you had kept a tiny corner of your heart for me. There was nothing to fear."

"Marjory! you have filled my heart since that first evening I met you at Mrs. Warwick's; and a tiny corner of it became yours that far-back summer day when I christened you my fair, my bootless maiden."

A luminous smile stole into the girl's face as, putting her hand in Tom's, she quietly answered: "I am glad to know that; it must have been Fate that drew us together that day. Do you believe that you and I were destined to meet, to love, and, if God will, to suffer together? I don't like to hear people speak of such things as 'happening,' and I am far from believing in chance."

"It was Fate, my darling! It was my twin-soul, my destined wife, whom I met that far-away morning at the loch-side. Life has many strange by-ways, and not a few of the most deeply shadowed ones merge out, through time, into broad sunny

paths of pleasantness and peace. Save for the sorrow that came to you at Loch Kaltree, it would be one of my brightest, most unclouded memories," rejoined Tom, in a soft, low tone as he lowered his gaze to the now pensive face by his side.

For a mist had, for a moment, crossed Marjory's love-lit eyes; her thoughts had wandered backwards; and Tom, unwilling to intrude upon the sorrow which had cast so dark a shadow upon her life, cared not to break the silence which had fallen upon her.

When at length the revived memories of that fatal day, which the mention of Loch Kaltree ever brought vividly back to her, had been overcome, Marjory lifted a sweet, calm face to her lover and whispered smilingly, "Forgive me for recalling the sorrow. To-day, of all days, that must stand aside before the joy that has found me. And I think that, even had you not sought me, I could never have put you quite out of my life."

"Then I had stepped into that life, darling, although I was bound to silence?" asked Tom, eagerly, whilst the radiance of happiness o'erspread his face.

"Didn't you know it? You may think me silly if you choose, but all my old interest in you revived that evening I was told I was to meet Reginald Warwick's learned tutor, and discovered who he was," Marjory answered, with a little laugh.

"Ah, you see we couldn't escape each other. Fate has intertwined our fortunes, love. Would you have it otherwise?"

"Nay, I am content. Haven't I given you proof sufficient that—that——"

"That what, dearest?"

"That I knew you would come, sometime," whispered Marjory, shyly lowering her blushing face, as if almost repentant of her confession.

"And you were right! Oh, my darling, it has been hard work to keep quiet, to be wrapped in silence, when my heart was crying out for speech! And you, love, will stand the test of your father's opposition? You will not falter should he disapprove? Tell me, dear one."

"I shall not falter," said Marjory, softly, but steadily.

"I am no longer in the category of the 'rustic probationer,' to be sure; but will your father be able and willing to forget I have passed but lately through that chrysalis form? Will he condone the offence, darling? Oh, Marjory! for the first time in my life I almost wish I could be numbered amongst those favoured 'sons of the gentry,' who, your father used to impress upon me, are the 'hope of the nation,'" laughed Tom, mindful of his former visits to —— Street, and the Major's emphatic adherence to his own somewhat one-sided views regarding distinctions of class.

"Won't you rest content with being the hope and stay of one solitary individual? My hope! my love! my brave, true-hearted knight-errant! Will not that humble position satisfy you?" asked Marjory, her face aglow with the love and happiness that had come to her, her bright

scintillating with the mirth that would not be suppressed.

"Infinitely satisfied, more than content, Marjory," murmured the minister of Staneridge as he lifted the little hand resting in his and kissed it repeatedly.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A COLD RECEPTION.

"I WONDER what on earth can bring that newly-fledged divine to my house!" grumbled Major Maxwell as the little maid-of-all-work, putting her head in at the parlour door, announced that Mr. Oxlade was waiting in the drawing-room to see him.

It was early in the evening of the same day on which the minister had plighted his troth to Marjory. The tea things still lay upon the table; and the Major and Mrs. Maxwell were lingering over the meal, which Marjory had swallowed so quickly that her father had thought it necessary to remind her that the habit of hasty eating was the sure and certain precursor of indigestion.

"It is kind of him to remember old friends, I think. Shall we ask him to have tea? I have still plenty here," gently replied Mrs. Maxwell, as she inspected the contents of the teapot and telegraphed a kindly glance of courage to her daughter, whose sweet face bore upon it a tell-tale tint of

happiness which was fortunately unobserved by the Major.

"Better not, I think; I have letters to write, and it's no compliment to ask a stranger to take lukewarm tea. Our friendship, remember, is but of mushroom growth."

"Surely the tea is not cold, Major; I thought my last cup deliciously warm. Let me fill up yours," rejoined Mrs. Maxwell.

"No, thank you. The tea is as usual. My remark was meant to imply that it would be cold by the time the usual platitudes customary in the greeting of strangers were exchanged; and that, also, I would rather not have young Oxlade in here to put off time. Let him make his call, and then I'll write my letters," said the Major, in a tone of brusque decision.

"Oh! very well! and perhaps, after all, he may have had tea," replied Mrs. Maxwell, quietly, though with a slight tone of regret in her voice.

The Major, indifferent as to whether or not the waiting caller had so refreshed his inner man, slowly drained his cup, ere, rising from the table, he left the room to greet him. And as the door closed Marjory left her seat, and, coming round to her mother's chair, impulsively threw her arms round her neck as she exclaimed: "Oh, mother! I wish it had been you he had asked for; won't you go and help him and stand up for him?"

"He may not need me to do either, dearie. He had better be left alone with your father; though,

had I not known his errand, I should have gone a once to welcome him. I always liked him."

"I too, mother!" laughed Marjory, well-pleased to hear the confession.

"Of course! you don't need to tell me that I knew it," answered Mrs. Maxwell, softly.

"Oh, mother! how could you? I never though anyone could detect my little weakness."

"Hush, child! You mustn't call it that. Token sufficient have been shown me that by-and-by my little bird would wish to wing her flight from the old nest. A mother's eyes are keener than you think, Marjory!"

"Yes, surely, when you found that out, mother But you are not sorry—you won't grudge to let me go, though you will miss me, darling?"

"No, dear, I'm not sorry. I won't grudge Tom his wife, because he is worthy of her; but I could not have given you up to everybody!"

"Of course not! but, mother! can't you think how father will treat Tom? Can't you tell me what he is likely to say?" cried Marjory, as, sitting down on the hearth-rug, she lifted her earnest blue eyes to her mother's quiet, gentle countenance which seemed in a measure to reflect the happiness beaming from the young sweet face by her side.

"Come, ring the bell, Marjory, and help Anne to clear the table. I forgot you hadn't called her Leave Tom to manage his own affairs. You know it's every man's right to win his wife, and Tom is not the first lover who has had to crave the boon from his sweetheart's father," rejoined Mrs. Maxwel

with a smile, as she patted the little hand resting on her lap.

* * * * *

Meanwhile the minister of Staneridge was pleading his cause, and trying to make the purport of his visit clear and comprehensible to Major Maxwell. He dwelt upon the love and devotion he had for years entertained for his daughter. He said he could make her the happiest of women. He frankly told him he had met her that morning, and to what that meeting had led. He had asked her to be his wife. She had accepted him. At that moment he was her affianced husband. Would Major Maxwell give his consent to their engagement and early marriage?

Very quietly did the Major sit and listen to all the young man had to say. He did not interrupt him. He did not seize any of the various pauses in the speaker's recital to pass any opinion upon what had taken place. He sat stolidly still until Tom reminded him that he was awaiting an answer, and urged his sanction to his betrothal with his daughter.

"You have taken me very much by surprise, Mr. Oxlade. I was not aware my daughter enjoyed any closer friendship with you than her mother and myself did. I knew, to be sure, that you were on intimate terms with young Warwick, and that Miss Maxwell occasionally saw you at his father's house; but not for a moment did I suppose that she could so far have forgotten what was due to herself and her family as to form an attachment

with you—without first consulting my wishes, at least," said the Major, whilst a stern, forbidding look settled upon his face.

"But now that she has done so, you will not deal harshly with her? I have loved her for years, and only to-day have I told her of my feelings. I have explained my reasons for delay, and I hoped my present position might remove your prejudice against me, and tend to commend me to your favour."

"I am much disappointed with my child's conduct; and I fear, Mr. Oxlade, that I must withhold my consent to her engaging herself to you."

"But, Major! I am engaged to Miss Maxwell. She has already accepted me!" pleaded the young man, in a subdued, serious tone.

"It cannot be, Mr. Oxlade! I cannot sanction my child's marriage with you. Had I suspected your intentions upon the few occasions you honoured me with your visits, I should have warned you that I never would consent to it. It is not too late to do so now!"

"It *is* too late, Major!" firmly replied the undaunted suitor.

"Allow me to judge of that, sir! Miss Maxwell is a minor, she must be treated as such. I shall forbid her holding any communication with you. Will you consent to hold none with her—to do your best to let her forget her passing fancy for you? Will you agree to this?" said the Major, fixing a keen, searching gaze upon the blank but

withal strangely resolute countenance before him.

"'Yes and no' must be my answer to that," was the ready reply.

"Sir?"

"I mean, Major, that if Miss Maxwell entertains only a passing fancy for me, as you would have me believe, and is willing to yield to your wishes, I shall not force my love upon her. If, on the contrary, however, she decides to abide by her engagement, she will find me unchanged, my love the same, my whole life at her service."

"I made no conditions, sir! I can accept none. I cannot let you go away with the impression that I shall allow myself to be cajoled into permitting your union with my daughter. It is so utterly impossible that I would warn you to abandon all thoughts of it, Mr. Thomas."

"But I cannot, Major! I am willing to wait. I——"

"No, sir! It is impossible."

"May I ask your reasons, Major? I am the son of an honest man. My forebears were not 'gentlemen,' it is true; they earned their bread by the sweat of their brows; and, as you know, my father is but a working farmer—but, Major, surely you do not need to be reminded that many men of high worldly position, of great intellectual prestige, have risen to their present station from as humble, ay, a humbler lot than mine. The shoe latchet of these men I am unworthy to unloose. I am not making myself their equal—I am only

reminding you that the world has ever been proud to recognise such, and that it has never scorned them on account of their humble parentage."

"You number the Chelsea sage amongst your examples, doubtless," interrupted the Major sneeringly.

"Yes! he and a crowd of others. Excuse me, Major Maxwell, but is there a gulf so impassable fixed between families such as your own and mine? I am——"

"There was a time when a daughter of a Maxwell of Inch-Maxwell was considered fit mate for the best in the land, sir!" thundered the wrathful descendant of these worthies, as he sat bolt upright in his chair, gleaming scorn and disdain upon the poor fellow who, in the folly of his heart, apparently imagined that the arches of the Bridge of Matrimony were sufficiently numerous to span a gap so wide, a gulf so deep, a breach so marked, as that which separated a Maxwell of Inch-Maxwell from an Oxlade of Denetap.

"You judge of me and mine," continued he after a breathing space, "by our mean surroundings. I have adjusted myself to these, but I would fain see my child reinstated in the position held by the Miss Maxwells of bygone days. She is young, and I have hopes that my old age may see my wishes realised."

"But will not the happiness of your child compensate for the lack of many things? I'll make her, as I've said, the happiest woman upon earth. I have no fortune to offer her; she has none, and I want none."

"My child has no fortune, no dowry to bring her husband. You are right there. But these you might obtain with another bride, Oxlade!" replied the Major, in a more conciliatory tone.

"Perhaps! but I do not intend seeking any other bride but Marjory. I'll wait until I win her, Major."

"And that is what you'll never do, sir!"

"Ah, Major, you'll relent! I grant that one of the Maxwells of Inch-Maxwell might have considered it presumption for me to aspire to her hand, but that family was scattered to the winds long ere Marjory was born. Nay! Major! I got the facts from yourself. I know nothing but what you confided in me regarding them on my former visits here," replied Tom, his patience well-nigh exhausted by the obstinacy of the impecunious old martinet.

"Their estates, their wealth, it is true, passed from the family in my grandfather's time—he was the last Maxwell of Inch-Maxwell. Had it been otherwise, Mr. Oxlade, you and my daughter would not have met. I have to thank you for reminding me of my fallen fortunes, of my mean surroundings, of my stricken circumstances. But understand, sir, though you may think the Manse of Staneridge a worthier home for my child than that in which you find her, I have decreed that, if she ever marry, it will be to her equal in birth, to her superior in position and wealth. Unfortunately, Miss Maxwell, in the meantime, can lay no claim to these; my hope is that her marriage (should she ever marry) would put her in possession of both, sir!"

"Wealth, position, and misery you would gain for her, when comfort, ease, and happiness are within her reach! Relent, Major, I beseech you, and abandon that pride which is but folly. Say that you will consider my suit—bid me wait, and not despair," said Tom, in a low, wistful tone.

"My doing so would not avail to change my views, would only be injurious to yourself. Miss Maxwell is so completely a child in my eyes that the idea of her marriage never occurred to me save as a far-off, distant contingency. You have taken me unawares upon a subject which I feel disinclined to discuss. In the meantime, permit me to counsel you to look elsewhere for a wife; your present choice is an unfortunate blunder. I speak mildly, and with every consideration for your feelings, Mr. Thomas, remembering that you are the son of my old neighbour of Denetap—a worthy man, whose wisdom I should like to see exemplified in your future actions. He is unaware of your pretensions, I suppose?"

"My father knows nothing of my aspiration to win your daughter's hand, Major."

"Ah, then, I am sure he will disapprove of your choice! Consider the whole matter ended, Mr. Thomas. Think better of it, return to your Manse, possess your soul in patience, and by-and-by you will woo and win some bright-eyed winsome bride, and forget your boyish infatuation. The utter impossibility of regarding you as my son-in-law has cooled my anger. And now, may I ask you to consider the matter ended, and to allow me to

get away to the correspondence which your untimely visit interrupted," said the Major in a voice so coolly patronising as to bring a flush of anger to the minister's face, as he replied in a tone into which, for the first time, there had crept a note of indignant pride and haughty constraint.

"I am sorry for having intruded at an inconvenient time, Major Maxwell! but I cannot withdraw until I know Miss Maxwell's wishes regarding our future relations. May I——"

But ere the sentence could be finished Mrs. Maxwell entered the room; and, ignoring her husband's frowns, warmly welcomed the standing visitor, congratulating him as she did so upon his recently accepted charge.

"Yes! I'm well pleased with my parish, Mrs. Maxwell; lovelier surroundings, more kindly hearts, I could not have found. I have every reason for thankfulness," rejoined Tom, hastily.

"I've just been telling Mr. Thomas, my dear, that I would have to get away to my desk; in fact, I've been plain-spoken enough to ask him to excuse me. I——"

"Allow me to explain, Major! I am here, Mrs. Maxwell, to beg your husband's consent to your daughter's betrothal to me. I love her dearly; and though I am but the Denetap farmer's son—an unpalatable fact to Major Maxwell—I have ventured to ask her for my wife. Can you intrust her happiness to me? May I hope that Marjory's choice will incline you to accept me as her future husband?" said Tom, humbly, once more

seating himself on the couch, and turning a troubled face to Mrs. Maxwell.

"If you have gained Marjory's love, I dare not say anything but 'yes,' Mr. Oxlade. Should the Major consent, you will prize her, you will be good to her? She is very young."

"I will, Mrs. Maxwell! you may trust me," replied Tom, fervently, in a low tone, while a faint smile flickered upon the earnest, troubled countenance.

"I think, my dear, you may be raising false hopes in Mr. Thomas's breast. I have just been assuring him that he must withdraw his suit. I do not wish to enter into particulars, just at present, nor do I desire to enact the *rôle* of the stern, obdurate parent, unless that *rôle* is absolutely thrust upon me. But let the matter rest for to-night, Mr. Thomas. Say no more about it until this day week. I must have time to explain my views; certain conditions and arrangements will have to be discussed if you refuse to accept the answer I have already given, as a final one," said the Major, making a strenuous effort to smooth his ruffled feathers before his wife, though at the same time darting a glance of antagonism at his would-be son-in-law.

"I gladly agree to give you time for consideration, Major! Any conditions, any arrangements, will be welcomed by me; and I think I may safely promise to submit to the most stringent, so that I may eventually win your daughter's hand."

The Major winced.

"Consult the Town-Clerk of Ephesus ere making any rash promises, young man. If you wish, and should her mother approve, you may see Miss Maxwell for a little to-night—not, however, mind, as an accepted lover, only as her father's visitor. You understand? Should you follow my advice and renounce your folly, let me hear from you. Such a step would save much unpleasantness, much annoyance to me. Think over it, and be wise in time, Oxlade," rejoined the Major, in a well suppressed tone of angry toleration, as he wished Tom "Good-evening," and hastily retired to attack his arrears of correspondence.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### AN INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLE.

THE Major's bark is certainly worse than his bite, thought the Rev. Thomas Oxlade, as he journeyed back to Staneridge the following day, in order to fulfil diverse engagements which could not be allowed to stand aside.

That Major Maxwell had visibly relented in the presence of his wife; that his opposition seemed lessened; that he had craved time to make conditions, to discuss his views, to explain himself more fully, appeared to Tom to argue favourably for his suit. Hot-headed and egotistical though he had proved himself to be, his sanction would, he doubted not, eventually be gained; and though, probably, there might still be in store a goodly amount of argumentation against the mating of a great-granddaughter of Maxwell of Inch-Maxwell with a lover so plebeian as himself, what mattered it? Any discussion he would mildly tolerate, to any condition he would gladly consent, so that these proved but the preliminary steps to becoming the Major's accepted son-in-law.

The days of waiting were far from gloomy ones to the Rev. Thomas; for through them all there rose the remembrance of the last evening he had spent at —— Street; while, ever and anon, the sweet, strong avowal of Marjory's determination to be steadfast and faithful to him inspired hopes that the Major would comply with his child's wishes; that for her sake he would throw his pride to the winds. He, therefore, expected that, on the expiration of the time craved for consideration, he would be acknowledged as Marjory's affianced husband. Nor did it seem that the minister's hopes were fallacious, when, in reply to his letter reminding the Major that he would return to Edinburgh, and trusted to receive his consent to his betrothal, a prompt acknowledgment assured him that, while disapproving of his pretentious claims for an alliance with his family, Major Maxwell would nevertheless afford him an interview, and would (under the circumstances) withdraw his refusal to his daughter's engagement, if the sundry explanations and conditions discussed did not prove obstacles to his further pursuing his suit.

The short, curt letter in no way discomfited the minister. A friendlier reply would certainly have been more agreeable; but, after all, Major Maxwell had shown himself to be so completely *sui generis* that the Rev. Thomas dismissed him from his mind, and turned his thoughts to the sweet, gentle girl who called him 'father.'

A few days later found the suitor hastening to

meet the Major at the club chosen by him for the interview, in preference to his own house.

He had arrived in Edinburgh the previous evening, put up at a hotel in George Street, and full of joyful anticipation at the expected favourable issue of the conference, sallied forth after breakfast, dutifully resolved to pocket any amount of abuse, to put a bridle upon his tongue, to do all, in fact, that in him lay to appease the opposition of the man who had it in his power to give or to withhold the happiness he craved.

Punctual and methodical in every relation of life, the Major was waiting when the young man arrived; and, after the usual exchange of courtesies, plunged at once into the subject which had brought them together.

"You have not then acted upon my former advice, Oxlade? You are determined to oppose me?" he said, with a certain irritation of tone, and an ill-concealed restlessness of manner.

"Nay, Major! don't put it like that! I have come to-day to wipe away your opposition, and to win your approval of my engagement to Miss Maxwell."

"The question is one and the same, Mr. Thomas. Am I to understand that, notwithstanding all that I formerly said, you are here to ask me to give you the hand of my child?"

"I am."

"You decline to withdraw you suit; you refuse to go away and let her forget you? It would be wiser, Mr. Thomas, much wiser."

"I am here to beg you to sanction our union. I love your daughter. No man can love or cease to love at the bidding of another, Major! Give her to me, and you 'll never have cause to regret it."

"That 's a wide promise, Mr. Thomas, too wide a one for me to rely upon."

"But you will consent, Major? You led me to believe that you would not frustrate our wishes. I am ready to listen to anything, to agree to anything, so that I may but win my wife."

"I said I would consent if you were determined to force yourself upon her; but I also said that there were some things necessary first to be discussed. To do so opens an old wound, Mr. Thomas. Must I take you, the Denetap farmer's son, into my confidence, and reveal the skeleton of my house? Can I not be spared that degradation, young man?"

"You will find me faithful, Major, peasant-born though I am!" replied Tom, humbly.

"You will not spare me. You will not go—go and forget?"

"I will spare you, Major! There 's nothing you can tell me that can alter my love. Keep your secrets. Do not probe your old wounds. I want to hear nothing of the past. Accept me as your son; give me Marjory, and let the dead past bury its dead. Come, Major! say no more. Do you consent?"

"I am a soldier, sir, and have never known fare. I am a Maxwell, and cannot sanction your

marriage with my daughter until I show you what you may have to look forward to in allying yourself with her. She is above you in station. Some lowlier maiden should have been chosen as the mother of your children. In after years you may wish it had been so!"

"Major, say no more! My wife is chosen. Consent to our union. Nothing you can now say can undo what is done. Won't you give your consent and let me go over to tell Marjory at once?"

"If I must, I must. But first look over these papers. I do not know what possessed me to keep them; but, having done so, they will disclose what I would fain keep concealed. They will likewise convince you of a fact—a painful fact—which should be known to the aspirant for my daughter's hand. You have promised to be faithful; let the knowledge of this fact lie buried in your own breast. Whether you marry her or not, breathe it not to my child," said Major Maxwell, glancing for a moment at his listener, and then averting his eyes.

"I promise to do as you wish. You may rely fully upon me in that," replied Tom, with an eager wistfulness in his voice.

"I tried to rid myself of this painful business by doing my utmost to impress upon you that I desired a better marriage for my child. But any discussion regarding marriage must inevitably have brought the explanations you have forced upon me. Now look at this. Can you understand what it means? Can you grasp the situation?"

said the Major, putting a business-like receipt into Tom's hand, whilst he still held several similar to it in his own.

The young man paled as he read it; and after a moment's silence thrust it from him, as he answered slowly, "I cannot grasp its meaning. Why have you brought it me?"

"Have you seen on whose behalf I made that payment? Look at it again."

"On behalf of a—Mrs. Maxwell. Am I right?"

"Yes! on behalf of my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Even so. That is but part of the skeleton, however. To know part is to know the whole. Read these," replied the Major, replacing the first slip of paper in an envelope and bringing forth another accompanied by a letter.

As the Rev. Thomas Oxlade obeyed, a low moan broke from his lips. There was a moment's silence; and then Major Maxwell lifted the papers which had fallen upon the floor and, hastily putting them beside the others, asked in a thick, hoarse voice—

"Do you grasp it now? Do you understand why I have brought you these?"

"Tell me. I fail to understand. Is that your son's name? Was he——"

"That is, as you see, a receipt for his board and medical surveillance in ——, the establishment mentioned in that paper. You have likewise seen the doctor's report on his case. He lived there at one time. He was my son. Do you trace no connecting link? Speech is painful to me, young

man. Do you still fail to perceive why I have probed my wounds to the quick?"

"Do you mean that there is—but no; it cannot be, Major," gasped Tom, turning an ashy face to that of the old man beside him.

"Finish your sentence, Oxlade. What is it you would say?" replied the Major, impatiently.

"I cannot; I dare not!" wailed Tom.

"Fool! were you not going to inquire the reason of these occasional absences of my wife and son? Answer me."

"If I dare presume."

"You may: know then that I married in ignorance of the fact that there was insanity in my wife's family. The ignorance in which I did so does not, however, exempt me from the suffering such a step entails. Think you it is a pleasant thought for a man to know that he has brought tainted blood into his house? I tell you, sir, the Maxwell pride was sorely humbled that day I saw my boy incarcerated in an asylum."

Tom's head fell upon the table. At length he understood, at length he grasped the fact that there was a barrier raised between himself and the girl who had so lately plighted her troth to him—a barrier which even his love for her dare not overleap. And a heavy groan escaped his lips as he murmured, "And he was Marjory's brother! O God, spare her!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### A FINAL FAREWELL.

BESTOWING a single glance of scornful pity upon the bowed, anguished figure seated at the table, Major Maxwell began to pace to and fro the room. The silence oppressed him. The sight of his companion's grief annoyed him. There was no ruth in his heart for the dejected, despairing man whose moorings seemed to have been swept from him at one fell swoop. There was but a feeling of resentment at the untoward circumstance which had impelled him to display to the eyes of a stranger the shadow which had darkened his house—the skeleton he had ever scrupulously guarded from the little world of his environment.

That the lowly-born farmer's son had become cognisant of what he would fain have concealed, that the foolish attachment he had formed for his daughter had brought about a denouement so undesirable, were galling, bitter facts for the Major to swallow. And as, ever and anon, his eyes fell upon the man whose acquaintance with his family

had, as he considered, resulted so direfully, it was with difficulty he refrained from cursing him to his face.

A low moan from the still bowed figure aroused him, however, and a moment's reflection brought a change in the Major's demeanour.

He again gained the mastery of his feelings. The man, hateful as he might be to him, had become his confidant. Words had fallen from his lips which he could not take back. Thomas Oxlade for the time being was his equal. He knew what few others did. His wisdom, therefore, lay in propitiating him, in getting him off the ground, in freeing himself now and for ever from further communication with one who had so strangely lifted the curtain from the irretrievable past. The household's peace was at stake; and the Major, hurriedly grasping the tactics necessary to ensure its continuance, decided at once upon the line of conduct to be followed if Marjory's happiness was not to be shattered in the same manner as that of her lover.

An hour slowly passed. The striking of the clock upon the mantelpiece was a welcome interruption of the silence which the Major found to be longer insupportable. Advancing towards the table, and laying a hand upon the young man's shoulder, he said in a tone, gentler than any formerly used, "It is a deep cut I have dealt, Oxlade, but the surgeon's knife is often an instrument of mercy. I would that friend or foe had served me as I have tried to serve you!"

But for several minutes there was no reply. The bowed head remained motionless; and only as the Major began once more to pace to and fro the room did Tom, wrestling with the grief which had so suddenly fallen, raise his ghastly face to meet a pair of inquiring eyes turned upon him as he whispered, "It is then hereditary?"

"It is. My father-in-law died in an asylum."

"But Marjory has never been as her brother?" tremulously asked the young man.

"Thank God! No!"

"And, were I to insist upon marrying her, would you allow it?"

"I would do much to save Marjory the knowledge you have forced me to give you."

"But surely she must know in what state her brother was?"

"She knows so much—not all."

"How much does she know?"

"Only that her brother suffered from mental derangement; the result, we impressed upon her, of over-taxation of the brain. Not for a moment did she suspect any hereditary taint."

"Was it then on your son's account that you sought the retirement of Earlsgrange?"

"It was. He had been in confinement, his studies were stopped, a country life was recommended for him; and so, on his recovery, I brought him there. You know the rest. It was a sad blow," replied Major Maxwell, beginning once more to pace up and down.

Again Tom's head drooped. After a short silence

the Major drew up beside his chair, and in a strained, nervous tone demanded—

"What do you mean to do now, Oxlade? The future lies ahead and has to be considered. I have done my duty! it remains for you to do yours!"

The words roused Tom from his apathy; he raised his head as he answered slowly—

"I would, Major, that you had not told me! Your confession has robbed me of happiness!"

"And saved you from—— Fill in the gap yourself, Oxlade! The path of duty lies straight before you, tread it manfully!"

"My duty is——?"

"To forget that you ever met my child. Think you I have found it an easy task to reveal this skeleton to a stranger's eye? Think you I would willingly stand by and raise no warning voice to save another from suffering like mine? Resolve to live your own life, and in time happiness will find you!"

"I shall never marry. My heart will ever remain with my first, my only love!"

"You will go home; and in your work will find a solace for your pain."

"I shall never find a solace for that! But what of Marjory? Her pain will be as great as my own. Have you no thought of her misery?"

"In finding that you do not seek her the innate pride of her race will come to her aid. She will not brook to be considered forsaken. She will struggle and gain the victory over herself. Fear not for her—a Maxwell can bear much."

"I do not understand. Am I not to see her? Am I not——"

"Good heavens! you would not go and tell the girl that! You do not wish to kill her, do you?"

"God forbid!"

"Well then, guard the secret even as I have done. When you go, take it with you; bury it out of sight. Marjory must not know—even Mrs. Maxwell I would have saved the knowledge of why you no longer desire a union with our child."

"Would she have received me as her son-in-law? She hinted that I might rely upon her consent, if I succeeded in gaining yours. She—she would not have had me know?"

"She would have given you Marjory. She would not have considered the future. I believe she is neither physically nor mentally strong enough to have acted as I have forced myself to do. Women at the best are but weak—when removed from the best—what are they?"

"And has Marjory never known of her mother's ailments?"

"No! Marjory has been carefully guarded. Besides, too, Mrs. Maxwell has been extremely well of late years. A child is so readily deceived," replied Major Maxwell, rising from his seat and turning to the window, while a dark frown gathered upon his brow.

"And you? How would you act were you situated as I am?" gasped Tom, after a moment's pause.

"I would consider the well-being of my unborn children, sir!"

"And her?"

"Leave her in the hands of Time. Leave her in ignorance of all, save that you no longer desire her for your wife."

"God give me strength to inflict as little pain as possible upon my darling! Act as I may, she will suffer; but I'll save her what I can! Major! you'll be tender towards her grief? You'll———"

"I'll help her to forgetfulness. I think of leaving Edinburgh. The excitement of change will effect much; your silence will do the rest."

"God grant she may forget, for I never can!"

"Youth speedily learns the trick of forgetfulness, Mr. Thomas. If ever we meet again your pain will be gone; your wound will be healed."

"I have literally obeyed your orders. I have held no communication with Marjory since I saw her at your house some ten days ago. She knew I was coming back soon to win your consent. Does she know I am here to-day?" inquired Tom, in a low, unsteady voice.

"No, I judged it wiser to say nothing. It was to save pain that I met you here."

"Do not let her know, Major! You will aid me in saving her as much as I can——"

"I will, Oxlade! What do you mean to do? She must not be left in doubt as to your intentions, remember! Better a sharp cut and done with it. I can countenance no half measures."

"No half measures! No, I'll write! I dare not do otherwise, I'll——"

"You'll not try to see her?" demanded the Major, frowning.

"I thought to be the bearer of your consent—I thought to take her by surprise to-day. God help me to keep away—to bear my pain in silence and alone!"

"To the point, Mr. Thomas! time presses. You have the consolations of your religion; they will doubtless enable you to bear the inevitable with resignation. Your conscience has decided what your course of action should be. There can be but one course open to you. Memory's dimming process will, by-and-by, make the path easier for you to tread than you imagine. As a specific for your despair, adopt the maxim of the great French sceptic, '*Travaillons sans raisonner c'est le seul moyen de rendre la vie supportable.*' You have a wide field before you, Mr. Thomas, in which you may test its truth. Lay your shoulder to the wheel. It is truly marvellous how time soothes our deepest griefs."

"My daily prayer will be that time may quickly heal my darling's grief, Major! No, I shall not seek her! It would be impossible to see her and to hold out. I shall write to her, and you may trust me to let fall no hint of the terrible obstacle which precludes her marriage. Not for worlds would I have her learn the truth!"

"Certainly not! Your letter will merely explain that you break off the engagement you say you

formed with her. Say anything you like, so that she definitely understands that of your own free will you have resolved to remain single."

"It shall be as you wish, and may God help her to bear it!" replied Tom, in a low fervent tone, as the Major turned impatiently away.

"A girl's tears are quickly spent; I thank you, however, for considering her, Oxlade. And now, why prolong this painful business? I have told you what I have for your own welfare. You bear me no grudge for my plain dealing? We shall part friends, shall we not?" he said, after a few minutes' silence.

"I bear you no grudge, though God knows you have given me a bitter cup to drink, Major!"

"And, because no one presented me with such a cup, my children have been sufferers, Mr. Thomas! Man, I would have drained it to the dregs to have been saved the degradation of seeing what befell my boy! Better for a man to suffer alone than to hand down sufferings untold to future generations. I speak strongly, Mr. Thomas, because all my life long I have felt keenly upon this question of heredity. We part friends notwithstanding it all, I hope?"

"So far as I am concerned, Major! Reflection, though it eases not my pain, shows me that honesty required you to take me into your confidence. And yet—and yet—I think I could so easily have forgiven your silence, Major!"

A strange smile hovered about the lips of the elder man as he answered—

"It is needless to say more on that point, Mr. Thomas! Deal a sharp clean cut when you write Marjory; remember, let it be a final farewell. The hand of Time will then begin her work. And now, what are your plans? Do you stay in town for a few days?"

"Not now; I shall stay the night merely, and take an early train home to-morrow," replied Tom, gravely.

"Let me see you to your hotel. I think you are wise to rest the night, and go home to-morrow."

"Yes! it will be best—but for her——" faltered Tom.

"Come along, Oxlade! It will be best for you to get home as quickly as possible, I see. We are both agreed to do the best we can for Marjory. It would certainly be a rash thing for you to run up against her to-day. The chances are against it, but I 'll go round to George Street with you," said Major Maxwell, observing as he spoke the ghastly face of the younger man who, raising no dissentient voice, rose from his chair and mechanically followed him from the room.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CROSSED IN LOVE?

THE Rev. Thomas Oxlade returned to Staneridge bearing the marks of the conflict through which he had passed. It soon became palpable to the most cursory observer that the iron had entered into his soul; that grief, deep and heavy, had laid its hand upon him; that the former light-hearted buoyancy of spirits had given place to a staid gravity of demeanour, strangely at variance with the by-gone brightness of the young minister.

The change elicited the commiseration and sympathy of the warm-hearted parishioners; nor were they slow in drawing their own conclusions as to the sorrow which had thus suddenly stepped into the life of the pastor they idolised. 'Crossed in love,' he must certainly be. That was the verdict of the worthies, and neither few nor feeble were the maledictions sent forth against the false, unknown lady, who had, they doubted not, wrought such havoc upon the lover she had discarded.

And the last link with the old, sweet dreams of

happiness was broken, when, a couple of weeks after his return home, he penned his farewell letter to Marjory. It was a hard task, but one that, when accomplished, somewhat eased the throbbing pain which ceased not, day nor night, to remind him of its existence.

The Major's injunctions to make the farewell final were not forgotten, and, after many fruitless attempts, Tom sent off the following short, formal epistle:—

"THE MANSE,
"STANERIDGE.

"Dear Miss Maxwell,—Forgive my silence and the breaking of the promise I made you some weeks ago.

"My greatest desire, my fondest hope, was then to be acknowledged by your family as your accepted lover. I trusted to return and claim their consent to our union. But since then, circumstances have come to my knowledge which forbid me to seek your father's consent. A barrier exists which forbids my marriage—a barrier which, if known earlier, would for ever have sealed my lips.

"I pray you to forget me. I beseech you to seek happiness without me; and to believe that, whilst deeply deploring the necessity for pursuing my present line of conduct, I shall ever remain your sincere friend,

"THOMAS OXLADE."

The farewell letter had no response from Marjory. How it was received, or what its effects were, Tom never heard. He was fain to hope that, with

the flight of time, a little harshness in her estimate of his treatment of her would tend to hasten memory's dimming process, on which her father had so strongly relied.

To feel that the last link was broken roused Tom to a review of the loveless life which remained to be lived. Shorn as it was of the bright roseate hues that had so lately tinged the future with beauty and happiness, it was no easy task now to scan the darkened horizon looming ahead.

The love which had had so short, so sweet a dawn, so sad, so mysterious a setting, refused to be put aside. The days glided into weeks, and these again lapsed into months, ere the Rev. Thomas Oxlade found himself able to adjust himself to the altered circumstances—to accept as inevitable the fiat of fate which had so cruelly snatched the cup of domestic happiness from his lips.

A short time spent at Denetap, ere the wane of summer, revealed to his kindred how deeply charged with the seriousness of life the once light-hearted Tom had become. To Mr. Oxlade and to Andrew the change was inexplicable; but the vigilance of the clear-sighted Hilda attributed it, ere many days passed, to the same cause as had the good folks of Staneridge; and her kindly heart was wrung with pity for the grief which lay thus darkling on the threshold of her favourite brother's clerical life.

That Tom had formed an intimacy with the late tenants of Earlsgrange in their Edinburgh residence was a well-known fact at Denetap; and occasion-

ally did the thought flash through Hilda's mind that, in some mysterious way, the Major's daughter was responsible for her brother's changed demeanour. Doubtless she had fostered hopes in his breast; she had heartlessly played the coquette; she had deserted him for a more eligible suitor. Such were Hilda's thoughts, and she grasped at Tom's reluctance to encourage conversation anent Miss Maxwell and her family as convincing proof that her theory was correct.

The ill-timed mention of the Major and his family had, on several occasions, brought a blush to the minister's face, which was not unnoticed by Hilda, whilst the slyly asked question of her father as to when the manse was to get its mistress, and the answer, "When you want to get quit of Hilda, I'll make her my housekeeper, father," confirmed her in her suspicions of Marjory's coquetry.

"Nay, lad! you're too late in the field for that! Hilda's trysted already—you forget that. Besides, if she weren't, I shouldn't give her to you, for you'd be putting her out by-and-by to make room for your bride!"

"I'm no marrying man, father! You'll never see wife of mine in the manse! My bachelor habits are getting more and more confirmed every day I live," Tom rejoined, with a faint smile upon his lips.

"There will be some fair, winsome leddy to knock them out of you some day, lad. But, I thought——"

"What?"

"I thought you would be giving me my daughter-

in-law this year, Tom! Your Aunt Kirsten is keen for you to marry. She'll not believe in your bachelorhood!"

"Aunt Kirsten will change her mind, dad! She'll have so much on her hands with Hilda's wedding when it comes off, that she'll be glad of a breathing space," Tom answered, with a forced laugh.

"Wee Hilda! I got a blow, Tom, when young Liston asked me for her! She's grown up so quick, that she was a woman in other folks' eyes when she was but a bit bairn in mine. But Liston's a good lad! He'll make her happy; and, after all, it's better for her to leave me than me her. I would like to see you all settled in my life-time, Tom," said Mr. Oxdale reflectively.

"So you may yet, dad! You're as hale and hearty as any of us," answered Tom, scanning as he spoke the grave, kindly face opposite to him.

"I'm getting an old man, lad! and yet, I'm as smart on my feet as ever I was. I've never known a day's illness for many a year—not since we left Riglands, I believe."

"You're quite an evergreen, dad—younger and fresher looking every time I come!"

"Scarcely, lad, scarcely! But I'm vexed I can't compliment you on your looks. You've fallen off since your last visit. You've been ill, perhaps, and concealed it from us. Is that it?" asked Mr. Oxlade anxiously.

"No! I've been well, quite well, father!"

"You need to tell it, lad, for you dinna look it."

"I 'm all right, dad! a bit fagged out, may be, but that 's nothing."

A curious look crept into the old man's face as, rising from his chair, he came over to where Tom sat. The two were alone in the parlour, for Hilda had disappeared, all smiles and blushes, at the first mention of her betrothal, leaving her father and brother to discuss the recent event without her presence.

"You 're far from all right, lad! and you must tell me what it is that has gone wrong. You 're in trouble of some kind, and I 'll not rest till you unburden your mind of it. If it 's anything that I can help you in, you know I 'll do it," he said, kindly laying his hand upon his son's arm.

"You 're very good, dad! but you mustn't worry about me."

"But I do worry about you, Tom! I 've known what trouble is, so you can't deceive me. Tell me what 's wrong."

"I would rather not speak of it, father! It 's true I 've met with some trouble lately; but it 's best to forget it—if I could do that!"

"I fear, lad, it 's touched you too deeply to be soon forgotten! I mind Hilda used to tease you about Major Maxwell's daughter. Has she anything to do with this trouble? I jalouse there 's a woman in it. It will go no further, Tom—has she? Tell your father, lad!"

The pleading tone, the wistful anxious face could not be resisted. Raising his eyes for a moment to meet his father's gaze, the young man, in a low,

earnest tone, answered, "You have guessed rightly, dad. I hoped to win her for my wife!"

"And she refused you? Or did her father think you no match for her? Was that it? There was a deal of pride wi' him, I mind."

"Do not press me, father! It's all over, and Miss Maxwell is altogether free of blame in the matter. You will not speak of it to the others, or to anyone! you promise?"

"Yes, lad! but I'm vexed for you; and sore vexed that I cannot help you. You'll get owre it in time, though; and I thank you for trusting me with your secret. It's safe in my keeping, lad! quite safe," sympathetically replied Mr. Oxlade, as he laid his hand caressingly on his son's shoulder.

"Time is expected to heal many sores, father! Have you much faith in its efficacy?" asked Tom after a pause.

"Yes! I've faith in it, lad; it's slow in working whiles, it's true, but it does work. Your trouble will grow less. Time has done too much for me, Tom, to let me doubt its efficacy."

"Ah, I'm glad you believe in its healing powers, father! By-and-by, perhaps, the scars will harden, though I doubt if they can ever quite disappear," replied Tom meditatively, his thoughts diverted from his own pain to that of the fair young girl to whom love had come weighted with so terrible, so dread an inheritance.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST.

WHILST the Rev. Thomas Oxlade was enjoying the sleep after sunrise which, during the busy days of harvest, was a forbidden luxury for the inmates of Denetap, his father, contrary to his usual habit, was sitting moodily alone in the little parlour which opened off the kitchen.

It was a bright morning of late September; the whir of the reaping machine, blending with the loud, merry voices of the harvesters as they were borne in at the open window of the room, fell unheeded upon the ears of the master. The activities of the new day, which so short a time ago engrossed his every attention, had lost their interest for him. They had suddenly, and without warning, been made to stand aside, whilst a far-back chapter of his existence, long since relegated to silence and forgetfulness, was brought vividly and startlingly to the front.

Mr. Oxlade had been early astir; and, having arranged sundry items regarding the duties of the

day with his son Andrew, he was leisurely sauntering homewards when a swarthy, ragged urchin, springing up from the copse by the roadside, smilingly accosted him with the frank confidence characteristic of the young vagrant.

"My granny is wanting to speak wi' ye, Maister Oxlade! she's waiting owre yonder for ye."

"And who is your granny, laddie? Is she one of my field-workers?"

"Na, na, sir! she 's ane o' the gipsies!"

"Her name?"

"She said ye'd ken her brawly gin I tell't ye she 's ca'd Miriam. Gin ye come I 'll tak' ye to her."

Mr. Oxlade's face blanched as, following his young guide, he speedily came in sight of the aged crone, who sat half concealed by the wayside, placidly smoking a short clay pipe.

Hastily rising to her feet and waving off the lad, she curtseyed humbly; then said in a low stealthy tone—

"I 've disobeyed ye, Mr. Oxlade! but I had to bring ye word. She 's come back! Three months ago she found her way to East Riglands. They took her in—kept her—and nursed her; and now she 's no far off. She 's dying, and yearns to see ye!"

A strange weakness caused Mr. Oxlade to lean for support against the dyke. He remained silent for a few seconds and then asked slowly—

"You have seen her at East Riglands. Is she still there?—and their blackguard son, is he also with her?"

"The blackguard is still in America. She left him years since; she's been working for herself until she fell into a dwine."

"Where is she?"

"She's found her way to Mrs. Lumsden's. She's at this minute lying in her bonnie room. Ye'll find her there, man!"

"At my sister's?" echoed Mr. Oxlade in surprise.

"Even so, master," mildly rejoined the sibyl.

"And you? What's brought you in this direction?" continued the farmer in a somewhat nettled tone.

"It's our way of living, master! But I'll be honest with you. We were pitched near your old place, and when I called in for Mrs. Dawson, I saw *her* sitting by the kitchen fire. I knew her fine, though she's sore changed. We spoke together—it doesn't matter what about—but the outcome was that two or three days after she took her seat in the waggon wi' me, and ye'll find her where I left her—at Mr. Lumsden's, your sister's."

"You've done far wrong! If the villain's mother was willing to keep her, she should have stayed with her. Mrs. Dawson's a forgiving woman when she took *her* in."

"She's fair bent on having a sight o' the bairns; will ye give her it, master?" pleaded the gipsy, wistfully.

"Who sent you here to give me the news?" demanded Mr. Oxlade, taken aback, and doing his best to parry the inquiry.

"Your sister! The poor woman is fair done with the journey, and may be I've quickened her end by bringing her. But the wee lassie that she put in my arms, and that I brought safe home to you—will ye no take her to see her mother?" urged the sibyl, coaxingly.

Mr. Oxlade frowned as he answered, "Say to Mrs. Lumsden that you've delivered your message."

"And ye'll come to see her? Am I not to say that, master?" said the woman, beseechingly.

"Say only what I've told you," he replied, bluntly, shrinking apparently from facing a proposal so unlooked for; then quickly changing the subject, he asked in tones more kindly—

"Have you been recompensed for the use of your waggon?—for your—attentions—to her?" The words came slowly and falteringly, but they brought a gleam of satisfaction into the eyes of the aged vagrant as she hastened to reply.

"The old gipsy wife was well-feed by the poor lass. She gave her two bonnie gold pieces; and for them, master, I promised to get her a glimpse of little Miss—a bonnie, wise-like, strapping lass she was when I spaed her her fortune by Loch Kaltree. I've kept well away since then, Mr. Oxlade. I've done your bidding. Eh! but my old heart warmed to the bit bairn that I happit in her cradle that weary night at Riglands, as soon as I set eyes on her and her brother."

"You told them a deal of nonsense, woman! I remember them telling me about you."

"All true were the words I spoke, master! Your son—your young son it was who was with the little miss. Your eldest I've never seen since he was a bairn hanging on by his mother's gown. The gipsy wife does not easily forget; and the mistress of Riglands never denied her either a bite or a sup when she used to give her a call on her weary rounds."

"Cease to speak of it," interrupted the farmer, impatiently; "and remember that no word of her passes your lips to man or woman hereabouts."

"Have no fear of that, master! the gipsy wife can hold her tongue. It's four years and more since she looked in upon you up the way there, and maybe she'll no be back. You cannot say but that she's been grateful to you, and mindful too, for no letting her old man be put in jail for a wee bit freeness with what was other folk's. I've no forgotten it, Mr. Oxlade! but I must away; my son and his wife are fain to move on for the fair at Selsdene, and after that, master, we'll be back in Northumberland."

"Very well! Here's something for the trouble you've taken on my account; and I'll see Mrs. Lumsden to-day, tell her," answered Mr. Oxlade, putting some silver into the old woman's hand, and hastily bidding her good-bye.

Very slowly did the farmer of Denetap retrace his steps homewards. A long, far-back chapter in his life had been brought before him, and a secret scrupulously guarded from his children lay almost within their reach. After years of heartless

desertion, the mother he had led them to believe dead had returned. The long-buried pain was re-awakened, and as Mr. Oxlade quietly and unobserved re-entered the house, it seemed as if the present had eluded his grasp, that the past had arisen from its tomb.

Tom's entrance some time later aroused him from his gloom.

"Here, and alone, father!" he exclaimed in astonishment at finding him in the parlour at that busy hour of the morning, "I thought I heard you going out hours ago!"

"So you did, lad! but I've had a message from your Aunt Kirsten, and as she wants to see me, I came in to rest before starting; it's a long road to Fieldnest."

"Anything wrong, dad? It's not like Aunt Kirsten to call you away from the harvest," remarked Tom, noting his father's dejected air as he spoke.

"I'll see when I go; but surely Hilda's forgotten us this morning. It's breakfast time, Tom, isn't it?"

"Very nearly. Trust to Hilda to be punctual, though. And if you're going to aunt's let me drive you down, father; it's too long a road for you to walk now-a-days."

"Not a bit of it, Tom! but it will save time to take the mare. So, if you like, you may drive me there and bring her back; you needn't unyoke, you know."

"But here comes her ladyship with her latest

achievements in cooking," exclaimed Tom, as Hilda, closely followed by Andrew, entered with a couple of steaming dishes upon her tray, and, at once seating herself at the table, prepared to attend to the matutinal wants of the father and brothers whose commendation had become a thing too commonplace and customary to evoke more from her than the slightest nod of her pretty head. Conversation did not protract the meal, which was begun and ended almost without other remark than Tom's introductory one; and a couple of hours later found Mr. Oxlade seated in the prettily-furnished "best room" at Fieldnest, deeply absorbed in listening to Mrs. Lumsden's excuses and reasons for having withdrawn him from superintendence in the harvest fields.

Tom, meanwhile, unable to resist his aunt's persistent efforts to detain him, had had to abandon his intentions of immediately returning home, and was sauntering to and fro in the little garden, listening to the baby prattle of a small cousin, who, seemingly realising the all-importance of the position assigned to him by his mother, was doing his best to entertain the tall, clerical visitor intrusted to his care.

But it was a pitiful tale of woe and sorrow that Aunt Kirsten was just then pouring into her brother's ear. The once bright, happy young mistress of Riglands, penitent and grief-torn, lay dying in the adjoining room, craving but a word of forgiveness from the husband she had deserted, sighing for but a glimpse of the children who

believed her dead. Mrs. Lumsden's compassion had been stirred; but it needed all her tact and pleading to awaken in her brother's breast a tender spirit of forgiveness towards the shattered, broken-down wreck who had been the idolised wife of his early manhood.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### AFTER TWENTY YEARS' ABSENCE.

OVER twenty years had passed away since the tragedy which had darkened Alan Oxlade's life had been enacted. In the new home to which he had hastened no hint of it had preceded his arrival, no breath of scandal had followed him thither.

A widower, dependent upon a sister's kindness for the upbringing and care of his motherless children, he had settled down at Denetap, determined to forget the bright, happy past, resolved so to bury the secret within him that no shadow of the trouble should ever reveal itself to his two boys and the girl, who were taught to believe their mother dead.

And, after the lapse of twenty years, that mother had returned!

She had made her way to Riglands to find the name Oxlade unknown to the generation which had arisen. The young farmer and his wife, who had but recently rented her old home, had never heard of it. Weary, and unwilling to abandon her

quest, she had reluctantly turned her steps to seek information elsewhere, when a suddenly devised plan, and a belief that her appearance was beyond recognition, induced her to struggle onwards to the adjoining farm of East Riglands — the boyhood's home of him with whom she had fled so many years before.

Changed and toilworn as she was, however, she did not escape the keen, scrutinising eyes which fixed themselves upon her as soon as her voice betrayed what her visage might have concealed. And as Mrs. Dawson realised that the broken-down woman before her was none other than Alan Oxlade's wife, she quietly, yet authoritatively, bade her enter.

The desire for news of her one black sheep, the prodigal, who had continued silent since his flight with his paramour, was too strong to be thrust aside, now that *she* stood before her. Twenty years ago the mistress of East Riglands had sternly declared that, bad as she knew her son to be, he would not have coveted his neighbour's wife had she shown herself his superior in morality and in purity. But the mellowing hand of time had been at work since then, and, as Mrs. Dawson sat listening to the tale of misery and hardship poured into her ears by the woman who had so recklessly dashed the cup of domestic happiness from her lips, to receive in exchange the gilded empty chalice offered by her son, a pitiful tenderness sprang up in her heart for the poor, hapless waif the once bright, gladsome matron had become.

The fact that penitence had overtaken her within a few days of her flight, that shame had prevented her return, that, upon reaching America, abhorrence of her sin had made her fly from her paramour and seek to maintain herself by her own exertions, all weighed favourably with Mrs. Dawson.

For Alan Oxlade's wife had verily drunk the cup of humiliation to the dregs. And as she slowly finished the recital of her story, and rose to continue her journey, the elder woman, moved to pity by what she had heard, pressed her to stay until better equipped by health and quietude for carrying out her project of looking once again upon the faces of her children and husband.

But weeks, instead of days, elapsed ere Margaret Lorimer was permitted to leave the hospitable farm.

Unnerved by revisiting the old scenes of her early happiness, she became so completely prostrate that at times Mrs. Dawson was sorely perturbed, and feared she would never leave her house alive. Good nursing and nourishing food, however, were not without their effects, and by-and-by a measure of strength returning, the invalid was tempted to assume a freedom from pain she was far from feeling. She began to move about between her room and the kitchen, and daily did her utmost to impress upon Mrs. Dawson that she was fast becoming able for the journey for which her kindly hostess judged her unfit.

Unrecognised, indeed, had the stranger remained.

The mistress of East Riglands, having pledged herself to silence, faithfully screened her from the curious tongues of the many coming and going, who were ever mindful to inquire after the progress of the sick friend who, it was known, engrossed so much of Mrs. Dawson's time.

There came a day, however, when a more penetrating, clearer-sighted visitor than the others detected in the broken-down, fragile woman sitting wrapped up by the kitchen fire the former lissom young wife who had been the sunshine of Alan Oxlade's hearth for six happy years. The old gipsy wife, relying upon the welcome never denied her at East Riglands, lifted the latch, entered, and, greeting Mrs. Dawson, turned her eyes towards the feeble figure by the fireside. A flash of recognition brightened up her wrinkled features; and, ere it could be prevented, she was by her side naming her and welcoming her as a long-lost valued friend. Familiarity with the past tragedy in her life was a uniting bond between Margaret Lorimer and the swarthy sibyl who stood by her chair sadly noting the ravages disease and time and remorse had made upon her.

Twenty years before, when young Mrs. Oxlade had listened to the tempting, alluring blandishments of heedless Will Dawson and agreed to fly with him to America, she had taken her baby girl with her to the appointed place of rendezvous—a lonely hillside path about a mile from Riglands—intending to keep the infant as the one reminder of the home she was leaving.

Time and chance had favoured her flight. Mr. Oxlade had gone to see his sister Kirsten, at Alnwick, where she held a situation as housekeeper in a small farm, and had taken his eldest boy with him. His absence extended for three days; but, short as was the time, it proved sufficient for her former lover to impress upon the young wife that his love for her had never waned—that the fact of her marriage with another was but a slight, easily-got-over obstacle which should prove no hindrance to her happiness with him when once they had left the old country and the old associations behind.

The last lingering reluctance to take the final step was overcome. Margaret Lorimer, forgetful that for six years she had borne the name of a husband who adored her, yielded to her destroyer's solicitations and consented to fly with him.

The evening fixed for her flight was the one previous to that fixed for Mr. Oxlade's return. The little household had retired to rest; the girl who acted as general help at the farm had received her usual instructions for the morning duties, and slept as soundly as Mrs. Oxlade could desire. Assured that everything was secure, the young wife and mother stayed but to kiss the tiny, toddling boy she was leaving behind; and, giving herself no time to reconsider the step she was taking, she snatched up her baby girl from the cradle and hastened stealthily from her husband's home.

Heedless of everything save that each step she took was bringing her nearer the appointed spot, Mrs. Oxlade walked breathlessly along the lonely road until she reached her companion's side. A vehicle stood waiting to convey her to the nearest railway station, and beside it was Will Dawson, triumphant at the success of his villainy.

So far no hitch had occurred.

The couple seated themselves in the spring cart; and then, having made sure of the woman he was leading to destruction, Will Dawson explained that he had not arranged for the child to accompany them in their flight, and begged that she should yet be taken back to the farm and the journey continued by a later train.

To this overwhelming suggestion, however, Mrs. Oxlade would not yield. She had given up her two other children, she urged, but she could not part with the infant; and as she spoke she clasped the little Hilda more tightly to her breast, who, blissfully unconscious of how her fate was hanging in the balance, lay with a dimpled smile upon her lips fast asleep.

The peremptory declaration of Mrs. Oxlade that the child must go would in all probability have gained the day had not the vehicle overtaken the old gipsy, Miriam, trudging wearily homewards to the tent pitched close by the side of a wood skirting the roadway. A moment later Will had resolved to take the matter into his own hands. The woman was a well-known character and a favourite at East Riglands. His mother, he knew, considered her

honest. She would, he felt sure, befriend him in the emergency, if he could only succeed in inspiring Mrs. Oxlade with his views and get her to intrust the baby to her care.

When the plan of sending the child home to her father by the hands of the gipsy was proposed to her, Mrs. Oxlade remained for some time obdurate. But as Will continued to urge it, and began to hint that she must choose between him and the infant, she faltered. In her weakness she felt unable to retrace her steps, and shrank from facing in her own home the exposure and the consequences of her ill-starred flight, which Will informed her he would keep no secret. Then, taking advantage of her hesitation, he boldly declared he would proceed no further unless the infant were returned, that he would rather stay and meet her husband's anger than be troubled with the presence of his child. And in dismay and confusion at this threatened cruelty Mrs. Oxlade succumbed.

Almost mechanically she allowed her lover to take the babe from her; and as she watched him place it in the arms of the gipsy a flood of tenderness overcame her. She got out of the vehicle, repeatedly kissed the unconscious lips, and then, taking her purse, she poured its contents into the withered old hands, and made the gipsy swear to convey her child safely back to Riglands, and place her in her cradle ere her father could institute a search for her recovery.

"I am going a little journey with Mr. Dawson, and he thinks the baby will be best at home,

Miriam! You will manage to take her back—unseen by her father—he——" stuttered Mrs. Oxlade, eager to hide the true state of matters from the woman who stood with her piercing black eyes fixed upon her in silent commiseration.

"Say no more! The journey you are going will be a woeful one. Daylight is yet a far way off. I'd rather it broke upon you in Riglands than find you where you're going, with him you've chosen to be your man. Go back, Mrs. Oxlade! go back! There's time to rue before it's too late; and the gipsy wife will tell no tales!" urged the sybil in a low whisper, as she correctly fathomed the intention of the runaway couple.

The words, however, fell unheeded upon Alan Oxlade's wife. The die was cast. And once more exacting a promise that the child should be cared for until returned to her father on the morrow, the heartless mother reseated herself in the vehicle, and intrusted herself and her life's happiness to the lover who, having clandestinely renewed his attentions some twelve months previously, had succeeded in awakening a warmer feeling of reciprocated attachment in the breast of his rival's wife than he had ever enkindled as the wooer of pretty Margaret Lorimer.

With many misgivings as to the consequences likely to follow the elopement, the gipsy had set forth the following evening to take back the child to her father. Acquainted in some measure with the habits of the household, she had stealthily

found her way into the kitchen, and had succeeded in placing the sleeping child in the cradle standing by the hearth, when Mr. Oxlade entered and peremptorily refused to let her depart until she told when and where she had become possessed of his daughter.

The tale as repeated by the gipsy came as a terrible blow to the sorrow-stricken husband. He had returned but a few hours previously to find his house deserted by the wife who had left behind merely a few cold, cutting words of explanation, assuring him that her love for him had ceased, that she was going to find happiness with another.

The recovery of his infant child stayed any proceedings on Mr. Oxlade's part. He took no measures against his wife or the villain with whom she had fled. The elder boy had fortunately been left behind with his aunt; and in due course was taught to believe that his mother had suddenly died during his absence, whilst Tom and Hilda, tended and cared for by a kindly neighbour during the first sad weeks that followed, grew up in ignorance of their loss; but, unlike their brother, retained no shadowy recollection of the bright, sunny presence of the young mother which sometimes flashed across Andrew's memory.

The tragedy which had fallen rendered life at Riglands insupportable to Alan Oxlade. The thought that his children would grow up and become acquainted with their mother's guilt was to him a never-failing, galling thought. She was dead,

and worse than dead, he told himself. And therefore he seized upon the first vacant farm to be found in the market, and hurriedly removed from the home which contained so many remembrances of the wife he schooled himself to forget.

His sister Kirsten was asked to take charge of the children; the one condition stipulated for in the agreement being that they should be brought up in the belief of their mother's death, and that the subject, so full of sad and bitter memories, should never be mentioned in his presence.

In the years that followed Aunt Kirsten faithfully carried out her brother's wishes. Lovingly and tenderly she explained to her young nephews and little niece how the sudden removal of their mother had come as an overwhelming blow to sadden and darken their father's life; and, begging them not to speak of the old life at Riglands, desired them never to mention their mother in the hearing of their father.

The years that slowly glided on brought no tidings of the wife Alan Oxlade did his best to forget. In leaving the old home he had abstained from holding any communication with the friends and neighbours whose sympathy had followed him to Denetap. And only when informed by Tom and Hilda of the gipsy who, in telling their fortunes at Loch Kaltree, had hinted so vaguely at the past, did his curiosity lead him to seek an interview with, and to make sundry inquiries of, the woman to whom he was indebted for the recovery of his daugher.

But not again had Mr. Oxlade encountered the kindly old gipsy, who had so strangely acted a part in the tragedy of his life, until she stood before him with the startling announcement of his wife's arrival at Fieldnest.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FORGIVEN.

IT had needed all Aunt Kirsten's tender, pitiful pleading to prevail upon her brother to gratify the dying wish of the poor traveller who lay comfortably cared for in the tiny bedroom adjoining the parlour in which he sat protesting that he could not again look upon the face of her who had wronged him.

In the years that had fled a hardening process had been going on, and had succeeded in so completely steeling Alan Oxlade's heart against his wife, that it was with difficulty he could submit to listen to the long story of misery and suffering poured out to him by his sister, who besought him with tear-dimmed eyes to let her carry but a word of forgiveness to the shattered wreck, whose fast waning strength had been spent in journeying to win it. Any other might have pleaded in vain. But against this sister, who had so nobly put self aside to minister to the wants of himself and his children, Alan Oxlade could not long hold out.

His obduracy abated. His heart seemed to thaw at Aunt Kirsten's earnest entreating words, and, after a sharp struggle with feelings of long-harboured injustice, he slowly rose from his chair, crossed the floor, and a second later stood by the bedside watching the feeble, flickering breathing, the pale, sunken cheeks, the worn, wasted form of her who had once been the bright, comely, young mistress of a happy bridal home.

As brother and sister lingered by the bed, the sleeper awoke, and a faint gleam of recognition and satisfaction crept into her eyes as they alighted upon Mrs. Lumsden, and then turned inquiringly to the figure who had stepped aside at the first signs of awakening, and did not stir until Aunt Kirsten gently drew him towards the bedside, and whispering the one word "forgive," left him alone with the wife he had not thought to meet again.

Returning to the arrears of household duties awaiting her, Mrs. Lumsden's thoughts fluctuated between the questions of what her brother's conduct would be regarding his children's belief in their mother's death, and how it would be best to act for the welfare of all concerned in the startling denouement which had presented itself within the last few hours. Mrs. Oxlade's long train of mental and physical suffering had quite wiped out of kindly Aunt Kirsten's heart the lingering feelings of resentment she too had rigidly cherished against her sister-in-law; and she had felt no hesitation in urging her brother to forgive the destroyer of his early happiness. But that

done, who was to judge what should follow? Who was to decide the course of action regarding the children, who, in believing their mother to be dead, had grown up respecting her memory, venerating, if they failed to understand, their father's grief for the loss of the young wife and mother they dared not speak of in his presence?

The problem troubled Aunt Kirsten not a little. She felt totally unable to direct. In her desire to make the dying pillow as smooth as it was within her power to do, she yet remembered that it might not be wise to gratify the mother's yearning, if that were to be followed by evil effects upon the sons and the daughter who, as yet, knew nothing of the tragedy enveloping their father's life.

So far Mrs. Lumsden had recommended leniency and forgiveness to her brother, but now she mentally resolved to remain quiescent. For, fain as she was to give the poor repentant mother the pleasure she craved, she had her doubts as to how her two nephews and young niece might comport themselves under the knowledge that their mother's crime, and not her death, had been the cause of their father's sorrow.

The course of action to be taken—which so troubled his sister—did not give Mr. Oxlade the same amount of anxiety. In consenting to visit his wife, he had resolved to save his children, if possible, the painful knowledge of her sin. The past had not been allowed to blight their young and happy lives, and he felt unwilling to bring them face to face with the safely-guarded secret.

which must reveal to them the enormity of the long-concealed guilt he would fain hide until the end.

When, about an hour later, he emerged from the sick-room, there was a softened light upon his face which Mrs. Lumsden had not seen there before.

"She's suffered long and sore, Kirsten, but it will soon be over. Will you go to her?" he said, simply, as he seated himself in an easy chair by the kitchen fire, and watched his sister pour out a little of the soup she had standing ready on the hob for his wife.

"And you——?"

"I've done all I can; she has my forgiveness."

"And the children? Is she to see them, Alan?" Mrs. Lumsden asked, falteringly.

"No! she understands. I've told her how they believe her dead, how they have cherished her memory, and she is content to have it so. 'Better to believe me dead than hear of my guilt,' she whispered. And she is right there, Kirsten. I would be loath to let them know now, poor things," rejoined Mr. Oxlade, fervently.

"They need never know, Alan! It is better so, much better," emphatically answered Mrs. Lumsden as she hurried away to attend in the sick-room.

The interview with her husband was followed by a prostration of strength which but too surely foretokened the fast hastening closing scene of the poor sufferer's earthly pilgrimage. The assurance of her husband's forgiveness, combined with the knowledge that her children had been taught to revere

her memory, had greatly soothed the dying woman; and as Mrs. Lumsden gently raised her head to enable her to take the nourishment she had brought, a feeble smile flickered upon her lips as she softly whispered: "It was good of you to bring them up to respect their mother's name. It reconciles me to going without a glimpse of them, Kirsten."

"They believe you were everything that is good and pure, Margaret, and they need never know anything else. You are content that it should be so?" asked Mrs. Lumsden, anxiously.

"Yes! But, O Kirsten, I've so longed for a glisk of their innocent faces! They were bonnie, bonnie bairns to have such a vile woman for their mother!"

"Hush, hush, Margaret! You must not dwell upon it—it can do no good, and you have long since repented of your sin. You have your husband's forgiveness, and your children will never know there was a blot upon their mother's character—will never hear there was anything to forgive. It is best so; it must be so now, Margaret!"

"Yes! it is far best, Kirsten!" came the slowly uttered answer, as the invalid sank back wearily upon her pillow and closed her eyes.

Mrs. Lumsden did not speak, and a few minutes later, as if mindful of an uncompleted task still before her, Mrs. Oxlade whispered hoarsely, "My baby that I sent back—my little Hilda—has she grown up a good woman, like you, Kirsten?"

"She's a dear, good girl, Margaret! Alan loves all his children, but Hilda has always been his chief

pet; and, by-and-by, in about a year or so, she 's to be married to a young farmer near Selsdene. She 'll be a sweet young wife, and she deserves all her happiness too."

"It 's difficult for me to think of her but as a baby at my breast, Kirsten! It was hard to part with her, but it was best for the bairn; best for the bairn——," murmured the poor woman in a feeble tone.

"She had to come back, Margaret! Alan would never have wanted his child."

"I must have been mad to leave my bairns, mad, mad!" sighed the penitent under her breath, whilst a tear trickled down her shrunken cheek.

Mrs. Lumsden did not speak, and was about to return to the kitchen when her sister-in-law suddenly interposed—

"Do not leave me, Kirsten! I want to hear about the boys. Alan tells me Andy is a farmer and a great help to him; and the bonnie wee lad I kissed and left sleeping in his cot, that awful night at Riglands, is a minister. Is that true, Kirsten, or is my mind wandering? Surely I've been dreaming."

"It 's quite true, Margaret! Tom is a minister, and a very fine preacher he is, too!" rejoined Aunt Kirsten, smiling proudly.

"Thank God for His goodness to the son of a wretch like me! He above all must never know. Do not let him blush for the woman that bore him. You 've done much, Kirsten, but you 'll promise me that again," gasped the sufferer, fixing a troubled gaze upon the kindly face bending over her.

"He shall never know, Margaret! You may trust me!"

"Yes! and I thank you for what you've done, for what you've promised yet to do—and may God bless and reward you for it all, Kirsten!" solemnly answered Mrs. Oxlade, laying, as she spoke, her thin, worn hand in that of her sister-in-law.

"Alan and I shall guard your secret till the end, Margaret! Do not fear! And now I'm going to leave you for a little; you are easier since we've arranged everything, aren't you?"

"Yes! I feel ready to go—I can die happy. 'He saves to the uttermost,' or there would have been no hope, no pardon for a wretch like me. You wonder at my presumption, Kirsten, but I believe His words, 'I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins'—that is my first thought in the morning, my last at night."

"'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool,'" softly repeated Mrs. Lumsden, as she scanned the weary face upon the pillow, and gently smoothed away a stray lock of the silvery hair escaping from beneath the snowy cap.

"It's wonderful; but it's true! It's long since I got my Maker's forgiveness, and now that I've got my husband's I'm happy. I can wait for a glimpse of the bairns up yonder; and I've no wish to see them now, Kirsten! mind that!" rejoined Mrs. Oxlade, a faint smile stealing into her pallid

face as she turned her questioning eyes upon Aunt Kirsten and slowly added in a low, solemn tone, "You've been a wonderful friend to me and mine, Kirsten, and I pray God to bless you every day of your life!"

A few minutes later the exhausted sufferer sank into a quiet and painless sleep, and Aunt Kirsten stole from the room feeling that a great burden had been taken from her shoulders, in that the long-buried story of their mother's guilt was not to be revealed to her brother's family, nor their happiness clouded by disclosures regarding the far-off past.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A DYING REQUEST.

"I AM going to say 'good-bye' to Aunt Kirsten, father. Have you any message for her?" asked Tom, a couple of days later as he leant over the dyke separating the harvest field from the roadway, and made his purpose known to his father.

"Then you really mean to leave to-morrow, Tom?"

"Yes, father! I'm sorry, but I must get back to my work now. I've enjoyed my visit to you though, and am feeling the better of it. By-and-by you'll come and see me! You won't forget your promise?"

"We'll see about that, lad, when the slack time comes on!" smiled Mr. Oxlade.

"Well then, have you any message to Fieldnest? I scarcely got a word with Aunt Kirsten the other day, she was so much engaged with that old friend of hers who was taken ill at her house. It's sad for the poor thing to be laid up when on a visit, but it was foolish of her to come in such a state of

health," said Tom, carefully selecting a cigar from his case and preparing to light it.

"Sick folks are best at home, Tom! She's caused your aunt a deal of worry, for she couldn't have chosen a worse time for her visit," rejoined Mr. Oxlade, after a pause.

"It's very unfortunate! but have you any word to auntie, for I'm just hindering you, dad?"

"No! just say to your aunt that I'll be round to see her soon. And, Tom, don't stay! mind Hilda expects you back to dinner, you won't disappoint her?" asked Mr. Oxlade, with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"No! whatever I do I must not offend Hilda. I'll be back in good time. I expect auntie will be too busy to be bothered with me," answered Tom, smiling, as he called Laddie to accompany him in his walk, and, waving his cap to his father, was speedily swinging down the road at a quick pace.

As the Rev. Thomas had expected, Mrs. Lumsden was busy—so busy, in fact, that for a single moment her kindly face clouded as she shook hands with her favourite nephew, and seated him in the easy chair by the kitchen fireside.

"I've only come to say 'good-bye,' Aunt Kirsten! I'm not going to take up your time," he explained, noticing her embarrassed air, her pre-occupied manner.

"You're not to think I'm sorry to see you, Tom! It's only that I can't spare the time to make as much of you as I should like, laddie!

I used you badly the other day, and now I'm going to use you worse, dear, for my friend who came to stay with us is sinking fast, and I can scarcely leave her a minute. She's dying, Tom, so that you can understand how full my hands are, and how I can't ask you to stay."

"Never mind me, Aunt Kirsten! See, I'm going off to-morrow, and I only looked in to say 'good-bye' to you and Uncle Sandy. I'm very sorry for your friend, though. Is there nothing I can do for her? Can I not help you in any way, auntie?"

"I think not, Tom! She's resigned and willing to go. She's quite happy at the thought of death."

"It's very sad, auntie! Can Dr. Hardie do nothing to prolong life until she gets back to her friends?"

"He was here last night, dear! he can do nothing. Her sufferings will soon be over. But excuse me for leaving you, Tom," added Mrs. Lumsden as she hurried from the kitchen at a faint sound she supposed she had heard from the sick-room, the door of which had been left ajar.

As Aunt Kirsten reached the bedside, the dying woman slowly put forth her hand, and in a low, toneless voice whispered: "I thought I heard you use the name 'Tom' in the kitchen. Is it my bairn that's there?"

"Yes, Margaret! The minister is going home to his parish to-morrow, and came to say 'good-bye' to his uncle and me. Your ears are quick, surely!

I didn't think you could hear from the kitchen," Mrs. Lumsden quietly answered.

"Kirsten, I thought I was content to go without a glisk of them; but now that Tom's here—will you—bring him? He'll never know! I'll not speak a word, and, oh woman! I just want to hear him pray before I go. It's what he would do for the worst of sinners, and he'll no think it strange to be asked to do it for a dying friend of his aunt's. Will you do it, Kirsten?" wistfully pleaded the poor penitent, hungering for a glimpse of the child she had forsaken in his cradle.

"I dare not, Margaret! Remember how they love to think of their young mother so long ago taken to heaven. It would hurt the boy to know," urged Mrs. Lumsden, taken aback at the sudden request.

"You don't understand me. He shall not know, Kirsten! I'll not speak. I'll close my eyes till he begins his prayer, and then I'll open them, and lie listening to my bairn's voice, with my eyes fixed upon his innocent face—my last sight on earth will be my boy's face, the last sound to fall upon my ears will be his voice! Kirsten! Kirsten! you're a mother yourself, and you'll do it!" pleaded Mrs. Oxlade, impressively, as she fixed a pitiful, tearful gaze upon the anxious, troubled face of her sister-in-law.

"It wouldn't be wise, Margaret! a word from you might betray everything. Think of how we've guarded your children from a knowledge of the

wrong, and think of what it would mean to them to find it out now!" entreated Mrs. Lumsden.

"Kirsten! Kirsten! I'm weak, weak, and going fast—I'll not speak to him! I'll only look upon his face when his own eyes are closed in prayer. When the last word is said, take him away from the room!"

"Are you able to look upon him, to hear him, and to let him leave your bedside without a word or sign of recognition, Margaret? I cannot fetch him unless you promise me," Mrs. Lumsden gently answered, unwilling to deny a mother's dying request, yet mindful of the welfare of the children she had herself mothered for so long.

"I am able—I promise to lie quiet, to look upon him, only to look upon him, when his eyes are closed—to let him go without a word. O Kirsten! I would not have him know that I'm the woman that bore him!—You'll do it, Kirsten?"

"I'm loath to refuse you, Margaret, and I'll trust you! Lie quite still, and I'll go for him," Mrs. Lumsden yielded, unable longer to resist her sister-in-law's entreaty.

"God bless you for it, Kirsten!" feebly spoken by the dying woman, were the words that fell on Mrs. Lumsden's ears as she slowly left the room in search of her nephew.

Tom, however, was no longer in the kitchen.

Having caught a glimpse of his uncle busily occupied in a field close at hand, he had joined him. And thither came Aunt Kirsten—much perturbed in spirit by the task she had undertaken—to ac-

quaint him with the wish her friend had expressed to see a minister.

"Just a few words of prayer, Tom, will comfort her; and you 'll save me sending for Mr. Durie, if you 'll oblige her," she added, hesitatingly, and quickly turned away to avoid further explanations.

"Of course I 'll come at once, auntie! I should have offered to visit your friend, not waited to be asked. By-the-by, I 've forgotten her name though, or did you never mention it?" asked Tom, as he followed his aunt towards the house.

"Her name is—Mrs. Dawson! she never gets anything but Margaret from me, though; you see I 've known her since she was just a slip of a girl," quickly rejoined Mrs. Lumsden, giving the name her brother had forewarned her to use if the curiosity of his children, or of others, should render it necessary.

Within the sick-room the dying woman lay straining her ears for the sound of her son's foot-fall; and, as Mrs. Lumsden quietly entered and advanced to the bed, her eyes travelled tenderly, quickly, towards the figure following her; and then, mindful of her promise, she meekly closed them, whilst a smile of happy content lit up her pallid, worn face.

"I 've brought my nephew to see you, Margaret! But do not stir, just lie quite still; I 've told him you are too weak to speak," said Mrs. Lumsden in her kindliest, gentlest tone, whilst a faint inclination of the invalid's head showed that the words were understood.

The thin, worn fingers ceased to stray restlessly over the quilt, and lay placidly still in the tight, firm grasp of her sister-in-law, as Tom, moved to pity by the sight of the feeble sufferer before him, leant over the bed and said in a soft voice, in which there was an inexpressibly touching hint of sympathy—

"I know how weak you feel, and I am just going to read you my own favourite verses, instead of asking you what you would like. Perhaps they may prove your favourites also," and without waiting for an answer, the old comforting words, 'Let not your hearts be troubled,' broke upon her ears, as Tom, opening his pocket Testament at the 14th chapter of St. John, read a few of its verses in a clear, audible tone, distinctly heard and understood by the intent listener, over whom Aunt Kirsten was keeping her anxious, troubled watch.

But the invalid lay motionless, breathlessly still, and only when, a few minutes later, Tom's voice was raised in fervent supplication for "the weary, pain-stricken sufferer whose earthly pilgrimage was so near its close," did she open her love-hungry eyes and rivet them upon the grave young face by her bedside, whilst a new soft light of ineffable tenderness crept into her pale, wan countenance as she lay silently listening to the earnest, eloquent pleading of her son that, for her, Death's sting might be taken away, and the grave robbed of its victory.

Unconscious of the love-lit eyes fixed upon his face, Tom stood with clasped hands, praying that

the traveller, thus suddenly called upon to lay down her life away from home and kindred, might realise the faithfulness of the Saviour's promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," and that her last hours upon earth might be cheered by the blissful prospect of a peaceful, happy entrance into that country whereof the inhabitant never says "I am sick," and the people who dwell therein are "forgiven their iniquity."

The pleading tones, the tender accents of her nephew's voice, combined with the pathetic circumstances of the ordeal through which she was passing, moved Aunt Kirsten to tears; but upon the face of the dying woman there was no trace of grief, no tear dimmed her eyes as she watched every movement of her boy's lips. The reflection of her soul's contentment was graven upon her countenance, and the ray of happiness which beamed from, and lent a new, strange lustre to, her love-lit eyes, seemed almost to give an appearance of youthfulness to the prematurely aged face upon the pillow.

A slight tightening of the hand Mrs. Lumsden still held reminded the sufferer of her promise. And as Tom's softly breathed "Amen" was feebly re-echoed by the sufferer, her eyes once more closed. Aunt Kirsten, rising from her knees, turned her tear-stained face to her nephew, and saying in a voice brimful of emotion, "You have comforted her very much, none the less so that she is unable to thank you herself," was about to

lead him quickly from the room, when her intention was frustrated by Tom, who, gravely scanning the now restful face, leant for a moment over the bed, and taking the thin, worn fingers within his own, bade the mother he knew not "Good-bye," adding kindly as he did so, "I am going home to-morrow, or I should gladly come to see you again."

The gently-spoken farewell, the unexpected touch of her boy's hand, brought a faint smile to the pallid lips. The eyes, however, remained closed; and in a voice tremulous with the long-suppressed emotion against which she had done her utmost to combat, Mrs. Oxlade faintly murmured, "God bless you and give you happiness—first here, then yonder." And a second later, as Tom followed his aunt from the room, she quietly turned her face to the wall and gave thanks to God for His goodness in letting her look upon the face of her child.

"Mrs. Dawson seems fast going, auntie! she is weaker than I expected to find her," said Tom, as he again reached the kitchen and seated himself for a moment by the fire.

"Yes! poor thing! But she's very content. It's a great shock to me though, Tom!"

"You've known her long?"

"Yes! I was at schoool with her. She's been abroad, and has had ups and downs like most of us, though, since I saw her last," rejoined Aunt Kirsten, guardedly.

"Well, I'm sorry I'm going to-morrow, or I would see her again. Mayhap, though, she'll be safe in port before then. To me she seems almost

within the gate," said Tom gravely, adding, a second later, "Would you not wish me to write, instead of you, to her friends, or——?"

"No, no, dear! That's all done as she wants; though it's good of you to think of it."

"Very well! I see I can be of no further use, and so I'll be going. I'll run in to-morrow morning on my way to the station; father's to drive me to Selsdene, so we'll not say 'Good-bye' till then, Aunt Kirsten! I'd like to hear how poor Mrs. Dawson is."

Shortly after her nephew's departure, Mrs. Lumsden hastened back to the sick-room, carrying a little of the nourishing soup she had carefully prepared for her patient. And, gently raising her upon her arm as she urged her to sip it, she smilingly whispered, "You stood it well, Margaret! and you are happy now?"

"Yes! and oh, Kirsten! I did my best not to speak; but when he took my hand in his, I just had to say 'God bless you' to him. You'll not mind it when I kept my eyes shut? The words just slipped out, and I forgot my promise to you."

"Hush, hush, Margaret! I'm glad it's so well over. You behaved bravely," replied Mrs. Lumsden, soothingly.

A tear trickled down the invalid's pale, wan cheek as Mrs. Lumsden replaced her weary head upon its pillow; and after a few minutes' silence she falteringly said: "My bairn's prayers are already answered, Kirsten! Death has now no *sting for* me; and I'm just lying peacefully wait-

ing for my call to that far-off land where the people that dwell therein are 'forgiven their iniquity.' It was a wonderful prayer, Kirsten! I said every word of it after my boy with my eyes wide open upon his face. It was maybe no right, but God understands how I was yearning for a glisk of my bairn, and He 'll forgive me!"

"Yes, dear Margaret! He understands how natural it was," gently answered Mrs. Lumsden, stroking the thin, feeble hand lying upon the quilt.

"You 're a good woman, Kirsten, and you 've been a mother to my bairns and a sister to me! He 'll reward you for it all. And may His blessing rest upon you day and night until we meet up yonder. God bless and keep you evermore, Kirsten! —Kirsten!"

The words were low and feebly spoken; and a few minutes later a peaceful smile flickered over her pallid face as Mrs. Oxlade sank into a quiet, restful sleep. And then, leaving her once more alone, Mrs. Lumsden quickly returned to the kitchen, happy in the thought that her sister-in-law's wishes had not been resisted; that her dying pillow had that day been soothed by the presence of her son.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### "MARGARET."

MRS. OXLADE was indeed almost "within the gate" when her son left her, and the following day, as he alighted at Fieldnest on his way to Selsdene station, and hastily ran in to take leave of his uncle and aunt, he learned that the end had come during the early hours of the morning.

Towards midnight the sufferer had fallen into a peaceful slumber, and had passed away in her sleep an hour or two later. Suspecting the end was at hand, Mrs. Lumsden had never left the bedside, but so quietly had the Angel of Death entered with his summons, that the weary spirit had fled almost ere she was aware of his presence.

Tom listened gravely as Aunt Kirsten spoke, and then, with a few kind, sympathetic remarks, he bade her farewell, and, reseating himself beside his father in the dog-cart, repeated what his aunt had been telling him.

It was well, perhaps, that the young minister did not notice the sudden paling of the grave face by

his side. As Tom sat innocently sympathising with the friends of the deceased—one or more of whom, he believed, were expected to arrive at Fieldnest that day — Mr. Oxlade shivered. He allowed his son's remarks to remain unanswered until, having mastered sufficient control of his feelings, he simply and quietly acquiesced that the circumstances of Mrs. Dawson's death were specially sad, and that it would be a hard task for his aunt to break the news to her kindred when they should arrive.

Had he wished, Mr. Oxlade might have told how he had been sent for by his sister in the early morning; how he had visited the death-chamber and looked his last upon the wife of his youth; how he and Aunt Kirsten had sat arranging that the visitor's remains should be interred in Selsdene kirkyard; and how, too, she had been instructed to say to her nephew that she expected some relatives of the deceased to arrive at her house that day.

All this Mr. Oxlade had done before meeting his children at breakfast, but not a word of it escaped his lips.

He sat listening to Tom's story as if it were the first and only intelligence he had received of the death at Fieldnest, and, by-and-by, he adroitly managed so to lead the conversation that the subject was abandoned for another and less dangerous one.

The drive was not a long one, and the station was reached a few seconds ere the train drew up at the platform.

"You've no time to lose, lad!" cried Mr. Oxlade.

as, leaving his father to follow the porter and portmanteau, Tom disappeared into the ticket-office, and then ran off to inspect the contents of the tiny bookstall, ere taking his place in the carriage selected for him.

"It's a narrow enough shave, dad! you might have had me on your hands for another day!" he exclaimed as, throwing his papers into the carriage and turning to take his father's hand in a warm, hearty clasp, he leapt into the train as it began slowly to move away.

Never before had Alan Oxlade felt so relieved as he did that morning when the train, bearing his son with it, steamed out of sight, and he was left alone with his thoughts. For Tom had been treading upon dangerous ground; and every remark which had fallen from his lips anent Aunt Kirsten's guest had been fraught with pain to the father, struggling to spare him a knowledge of the carefully guarded secret, striving to comport himself as an ordinary disinterested, yet sympathetic, hearer before the lad who, conversing about his unknown mother, dreamt not that the relative referred to by his Aunt Kirsten as expected at Fieldnest was none other than the grave, taciturn father sitting by his side—the husband of her he spoke of as "Mrs. Dawson."

The morning air soothed and calmed Mr. Oxlade. He began to breathe freely. The few errands intrusted to him by Hilda were not forgotten, and then, mindful of the task still awaiting him, *he stabled* his horse at the Golden Pheasant, and

slowly went to give the necessary instructions for the funeral, fixed to take place a couple of days later.

A little corner of the old kirkyard was selected for *her* resting-place—a sunny, peaceful spot, not far from that where poor Karl Maxwell lay taking his last deep sleep; and then the newly-made widower, musing sadly at the strange shaping of events which had brought him hither, retraced his steps to the Golden Pheasant, picked up his waiting dog-cart, and slowly faced homewards.

In that drive the present gradually slipped away from Alan Oxlade's thoughts. The past came boldly to the front. The dead woman was forgotten; she was nought to the man who had loved and wooed —not her, but sweet, pretty Margaret Lorimer; nought to the man who would have taken his oath that *his* wife was pure as one of Heaven's angels, and true as the needle to the Pole.

The far-off years were lived over again. The old love was rekindled. Youth and youth's joys were within his grasp. The present was but a myth, a nightmare which would pass; the past, with the bright golden years of his bridal home were all before him as Alan Oxlade slowly wended homewards that eventful September day.

The dream stayed until Fieldnest again came in view, and with the first glimpse of the neat white-washed steading Alan Oxlade's mental vision waxed dim. The past slid into the background. The present once more asserted itself and reminded him that, not the loved young wife of bygone times required *his* thoughtful care and attention, but she,

his sister's guest, the dead woman for whom he had been choosing a resting-place in Selsdene's quiet kirkyard.

The awakening was brimful of pain; and Mr. Oxlade sighed deeply as, alighting in the court-yard and leaving his horse in charge of a boy, he entered the house and sat down once more to discuss the preparations for the funeral with his sister and brother-in-law, ere continuing his homeward journey.

It was with relief that Mrs. Lumsden learned that her nephew was away, and safely removed from the risk of discovering the sad story which, during his presence, required such constant guarding to elude the grasp of so well-meaning and kindly a sympathiser as Tom. With regard to the others there needed less watchfulness. And Aunt Kirsten felt more secure with them than she had done with the young minister coming and going between the farms. Andrew's time was fully occupied with the harvest operations; whilst Hilda, she felt sure, would have her hands full with the heavier household duties falling to her share during the busy season; and, knowing this, Aunt Kirsten breathed more freely now that Tom's visit was so opportunely over.

"They're different from him. They have their day's work before them, and they'll be content to hear what you choose to tell them without coming down to see me, like poor Tom," she impressed upon her brother, as he sat talking with her husband and *herself.*

And Mrs. Lumsden's theory proved correct.

Later in the day Mr. Oxlade quietly informed his son and daughter that their aunt's visitor, Mrs. Dawson, was no more; and that a relative who had arrived at Fieldnest had fixed the interment to take place in Selsdene kirkyard a couple of days hence, adding that he had been asked to attend the funeral along with their Uncle Sandy, and had agreed to do so.

The information given, Mr. Oxlade stayed not to hear the readily expressed sympathy of the young folks, but retired to his room and his own thoughts, leaving Andrew and Hilda alone in the little parlour to comment upon the suddenness of the death at Fieldnest, and the sorrow their Aunt Kirsten must feel at the sad termination of her friend's visit.

Two days later the remains of Alan Oxlade's erring, repentant wife were laid quietly to rest in the sunny nook of the neighbouring God's acre chosen by her husband. The mourners, exclusive of the Rev. Mr. Durie, the minister of the parish, numbered but three—namely, Mr. Oxlade, Mr. Lumsden, and a cousin of the latter who had unexpectedly arrived from Ireland the day following the death, and had been urged by Aunt Kirsten to join her husband and brother in paying the last tribute of respect to the companion of her girlhood's years.

The event at Fieldnest was sympathetically commented upon by the friends and neighbours of the district. To these judicious Aunt Kirsten

never forgot to speak of her guest as 'Mrs. Dawson'; and soon, amidst the all-absorbing tasks of their busy lives, the sudden death at Fieldnest was forgotten. And then Mrs. Lumsden bethought herself of a task she had yet to discharge towards her who was gone.

The day previous to her death Mrs. Oxlade had put into her sister-in-law's hands a little sum of money—some five pounds in all—and told her it was to be spent in defraying the expenses connected with her burial. At the time kindly Aunt Kirsten had remonstrated, assuring the invalid that should she be taken away Mr. Oxlade would attend to everything necessary, as well as to the payment of all expenses. But the dying wife had refused to listen; and, quietly putting the money into Aunt Kirsten's hand, had desired her to say no more about it, but to carry out her wishes. This Aunt Kirsten had not done; for her brother, requesting her to keep the money as a little recompense for the trouble she had had, refused to allow it to be spent as his wife had intended, and insisted upon defraying all expenses out of his own funds.

Hence Aunt Kirsten, still having her sister-in-law's little savings, decided that they should be spent upon erecting a simple tombstone over her grave, and mooted the matter to her brother.

"I would have done that too, Kirsten, but for the name difficulty," he had answered, quietly and at once.

"*I've not* forgotten that either! Lorimer or

Oxlade it cannot be, for the bairns' sake; and that other, which for a day or two we gave her, was never her's, Alan! I couldn't have it put on."

And forthwith faithful, kindly Aunt Kirsten, ever mindful of the feelings and interests of those 'bairns' she loved almost as dearly as her own little blossom, began to make her proposal known to her brother. It met with no opposition from him. Nay, he admitted it was the one way out of the difficulty; and, giving his sister permission to do as she liked in the matter, he left it entirely in her hands.

Relieved to have it so, Mrs. Lumsden lost no time in spending the five pounds left by her brother's wife. And the following week another tombstone was added to the number already studding the pretty rural kirkyard of Selsdene. A simple tablet bearing the one word "Margaret," and beneath it the verse, "In My Father's house are many mansions," stood over the grave where, so shortly before, the remains of Alan Oxlade's wife had been laid.

It excited no comment, and so plain and unpretentious was it that it called forth but little admiration from the many passers-by. To Aunt Kirsten, however, it yielded not a little satisfaction. And though neither husband nor child of her who slumbered there ever lingered lovingly over it, the mistress of Fieldnest never entered the kirk door without first letting her eyes rest tenderly upon the spot over which hung the safely-guarded tragedy of her brother's life.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A WOUNDED HEART.

THE months which had glided past since the painful interview between Major Maxwell and the Rev. Thomas Oxlade did not bring forgetfulness of her lover to Marjory. The wondrously healing properties attributed to time by the Major had not proved efficacious in the case of his daughter. Memory's dimming process had not yet erased Tom's image from her heart. The fact that her lover had ceased to desire a union with her, that he had penned so cold, so formal a letter in breaking off the engagement, and that, too, she was to be left in ignorance of the 'barrier' precluding his fulfilment of it, was a heavy shock, a serious blow to Miss Maxwell.

Prepared and ready to coax and win her father's consent to her marriage, or, if need be, to rebel stoutly against his opposition to it, poor Marjory felt herself helpless under her sudden abandonment. The blow dealt, not by the hand of her father but by that of her lover, cut her to the quick, wounded *her bitterly.*

The weeks passed into months, and the wound still remained an open sore.

Mrs. Maxwell marvelled greatly at Tom Oxlade's conduct. It was heartless, it was cruel, and, more than all, it was cowardly to pen so inexplicable a letter, instead of openly calling at the house to make his explanations in person, she kept telling herself, as she mused over the suddenly shaped determination of the young minister in whom she had been so grievously deceived. And through it all the Major listened quietly to her denouncements of the absent lover. He did not reprimand or contradict her. The utmost he did in the matter, so incessantly urged upon his attention, was to assure his wife that the son of the Denetap farmer was no meet mate for his daughter; hinting as he did so, however, that a bride of meaner birth, but with a heavier lined purse, had probably allured the vacillating wooer from his allegiance, and that, in the fulness of time, it would be found that their child was best quit of so fickle, so altogether undesirable a lover as, in her weakness and without his authority, she had chosen.

By degrees the matter assumed a quiescent form. It irritated Major Maxwell to have it referred to in his presence; and to his wife's suggestion that he should communicate with the Rev. Thomas anent the cowardly manner of his procedure, the Major haughtily assured her that such a step would be so completely out of keeping with the dignity inalienable from his race that it was not for a moment to be thought of.

Thus slowly and gradually the subject was allowed to slip into the background. Mrs. Maxwell, believing that nothing could be done to soothe her daughter's pain, tacitly shunned any reference to it. And, hoping everything from a few months' sojourn in England, followed, during the winter, by the visit to Biarritz upon which her husband had decided, she resolved to woo Marjory back to gladness and happiness by allowing her every opportunity to devote her time and attention to the painting she loved.

In the pursuit of art she trusted forgetfulness of her sorrow would ensue, and the pain of the past be obliterated. And, indeed, it seemed that, after the lapse of the first few months, the frequent change of abode and the ever-varying scenes through which she was passing were doing the work Mrs. Maxwell intended they should.

Marjory, sad and pensive as of yore, it is true, began to rouse herself into taking a more active interest in her surroundings. She set herself untiringly to profit as largely as possible from the advantages within her reach, and the landscapes and portraits of her canvas testified in no small measure to her skill and diligence, as well as to the rapid strides she was making in the work she loved, and in which she found the only solace for the sorrow which had crept into her life.

All the same, however, Marjory was not for getting.

Her heart still ached; her wound still bled.

The knowledge that Tom no longer wished her for his wife, that he had so coolly wooed and won her love but to cast it from him, prompted her, by-and-by, to feign an indifference, to affect a gaiety which led her mother to believe her pain was lessening, her grief steadily and surely abating.

But it was not so.

The Major had spoken truly in telling the Rev. Thomas Oxlade that a Maxwell could bear much, and Marjory was but proving herself no exception to those of her race whose powers of silent, undaunted endurance had given rise to the belief.

In deference to the Major's wishes, the winter months were spent at Biarritz. The place was a favourite of his. The climate, striking the happy medium between the severity of the English and the, to him, enervating warmth of the sunnier Riviera, exactly suited his tastes and constitution. And that it did so afforded Mrs. Maxwell and Marjory no little gratification. For the first time, too, since Scotland had been left behind, the latter had voluntarily expressed herself as being completely content, and anxious to settle down for a more lengthened period than her father had hitherto done in any of the various places he had chosen to visit.

Biarritz captivated Marjory. She worked hard during the quickly passing winter months, and then, declaring she could not tear herself away from the mighty swell of the huge Atlantic breakers, nor be happy if removed from the sooth-

ing influence its every mood exerted over her, she begged her father to prolong his stay into spring. The pale, wistful face, bearing its pensive, far-away smile, raised to meet his gaze, could not be resisted. The Major, by no means loath to tarry longer in a place so full of attraction to him, yielded the point; and April was hastening to its close ere he and his family arrived in London.

Marjory's diligence had been steadily bringing her the once coveted gains she had been so anxious to reap. Her pictures were not left upon her hands. They sold well; and, although she was still, as she smilingly told her mother, 'unknown to fame,' more than one qualified to deliver an opinion upon the matter, assured Mrs. Maxwell that, if her daughter but continued to make as rapid strides as she had heretofore done, the young artist's name should be, ere long, no unfamiliar one in the world of art.

The prospect was hope-inspiring, and often exercised a sustaining influence over Marjory. But there were times when palette and brushes would be thrown aside, the canvas upon her easel remain untouched; times when the old smarting pain would break forth with redoubled force. And at these times art and its gains were nought, the consolation her work afforded her *nil;* and the one cry of her aching heart was to be freed from the pain which would not be stifled—to be rid of the haunting memories of her short-lived joy.

These were Marjory's bad days. They could not be hid from the eyes of her ever-watchful mother,

nor yet could they escape the less vigilant scrutiny of her father.

But they passed away.

Pride came to the rescue. And the girl, bruised and hurt at the remembrance of the frank confession of her love which the Rev. Thomas had drawn from her too confiding lips, goaded herself into a fresh struggle with the pain she would fain keep hidden within her breast. Hard work would follow for a season. Again palette and brushes would be seized upon, and the young artist would do her bravest, her best, to wear a smile upon her pensive face.

But the pain was dormant, not dead. Anew it would assert itself, and Marjory would be powerless as formerly to banish it from her thoughts.

The more her indignation burned against the man who had cast her from him, the more did her love abide with him. And the days glided on and the weeks passed, but the pain stayed, and the old love would not be quenched.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CHANGE OF SCENE.

HAD money been more plentiful the Major would have carried his wife and daughter to one fashionable spa after another, and the pleasures and gaieties so freely indulged in by the Maxwells of Inch-Maxwell, of bygone times, would have been placed at their disposal.

In bequeathing to him the tastes of his ancestors, however, Fortune had, in surly mood, laid her bit upon Nature, and withheld the means for their gratification. The question of summer quarters had, therefore, to be discussed with a careful regard to the *res augusta domi* which dictated that it would be advisable to settle down in some picturesque locality which, in affording Marjory ample scope for her brushes, would yet not be without a medium of reward to himself and his wife.

The choice of abode rested with the Major. He was, however, in no haste to decide; and the weeks glided on, and his fancy migrated from one spot to another so frequently and so indefinitely,

that the intense heat of an unusually warm summer found him still in London, sighing to get away from it, and yet unable to settle the important point of whether Harrogate, Buxton, or Malvern, would prove most beneficial as a camping ground.

To have reached so short a leet was, however, one step in advance; and Mrs. Maxwell, tired of suggesting that some quieter, less fashionable resort would be more in unison with her own and Marjory's tastes, patiently awaited the result.

After consideration of the matter for a few days longer, the Major intimated the decision at which he had arrived. It was Malvern; and the trio shortly thereafter entered upon their lease of the plain but comfortable lodgings engaged for their use.

The choice was a happy one. The place abounded in resources, and there was lack of neither occupation nor amusement. The richness and variety of the scenery proved a continual feast to the travellers, and not infrequently, whilst the Major was absent on the longer excursions in which he delighted, Mrs. Maxwell and Marjory found their keenest enjoyment in simply gazing on the fair panoramic views of unsurpassed magnificence which met them on every side.

Amidst such scenes of marvellous splendour, palette and brushes could not lie idle. The elder lady did her utmost to stimulate her daughter's flagging ambition; and, ere many weeks had passed, Marjory, nerved into action by the untiring example of industry set before her, was doing her

best to fulfil the hopes her mother had built, and was busily transferring to canvas landscape after landscape of the fairy paradise stretching around her in all its bewitching loveliness.

And, meanwhile, the Major was exultantly satisfied with his environment and the surroundings of his new abode. The air was the freshest and sweetest to be found, and he was but seldom within doors. He explored the neighbourhood on foot and on horseback, and willingly became the companion and guide of his wife and daughter to every place of interest within an attainable distance.

He had, too, recognised and renewed acquaintance with several old friends amongst the health-seekers and believers in the water cure, with whom Malvern was overflowing; and, under their influence and example, he was fast becoming a convert to the doctrine of hydropathy, and eagerly anxious to instil his new tenets upon his less credulous womankind.

Daily he visited the never-failing shrine of holiday-makers, St. Anne's Well, and always returned declaring that a single draught of its cool refreshing water was of more value than all the most highly prized tonics in the pharmacopœia put together. He tested the strength and elasticity of his lung powers by climbing every peak of the Malvern Ridge. He organised picnics and walking expeditions to be shared with Marjory; and not infrequently he waxed impatient at the less enthusiastic energy she displayed over one or other of the feats of pedestrianism undertaken by him with the sole

ST. ANNE'S WELL.

and laudable purpose of re-awakening some of the unforgotten and oft-regretted high spirits of the old far-away times, which had so completely forsaken his girl.

Marjory's continued sadness was the one spot upon Major Maxwell's sun. Her sweet pensiveness, her quiet, listless participation in every pleasure he arranged, astonished and annoyed him. Instead of the gravity now characterising her every movement, fain would he have heard the old cheery laughter, and been met with the saucy, pert answers, which once upon a time came so readily to her lips, but which he had so often greeted with nought save a callous reprimand.

But the laughter and the smiles of other days had fled; they could not be re-created. Time's kindly hand had failed to cure. Its all-powerful healing influence had been exaggerated by the father, who could not shut his eyes to the settled sadness creeping over the young fair face.

And the days rolled smoothly on, and the weeks lapsed into months, and the attractions of Malvern did not pall upon Major Maxwell.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AN ACCIDENT.

"HOW late they are, mother!" cried Miss Maxwell, turning slowly from the window of the little sitting-room, and resting her pretty head for a moment upon the chimney-piece.

"Six o'clock, dear! but we must make allowances for Captain Beatson. He is the most unpunctual mortal I ever met, and it will never do to grudge him another half-hour before we begin to grumble," rejoined Mrs. Maxwell, smiling, as she raised her eyes for a second from the book she held in her hands, and carelessly drew out her watch.

"Till half-past six then, mother, and then——"

"You may scold him as much as you choose! He declared nothing short of a broken neck would detain him a minute after half-past five, and yet he's just going to prove as bad as ever. He's incorrigible!"

"If any one should be able to teach him punctuality, it is father; and he having failed, I suppose

we must look upon him as beyond reformation," sighed Marjory, once more crossing the room and resuming her seat at the window.

The 'they' referred to by Marjory, and for whom she and her mother were so impatiently waiting tea, were the Major and a Captain Beatson, an old, well-nigh forgotten friend, who had last been greeted at Malta, whom the Major had unexpectedly rencountered, complacently sipping his morning draught at St. Anne's Well, during the early days of his sojourn at Malvern.

Delighted to find so ready a disciple of the virtues of hydropathy, and likewise so stationary a visitor among the many comers and goers to his favourite spa, Captain Beatson speedily established himself upon a familiar footing at the Major's lodgings, and good-naturedly constituted himself the active, well-informed cicerone of the friends he hoped to keep beside him during his own somewhat lengthened stay. A bachelor with time and money in abundance at his disposal, he was willing to amuse and be amused at any hour of the day; and Mrs. Maxwell oft-times laughingly assured him that progress with her painting was in no small measure due to the close companionship he maintained with her husband, for, owing to the daily intercourse of the two comrades, she had hours at her disposal that would otherwise have been spent with the Major in exploring the neighbourhood, and in fatiguing walks, for which the Captain proved himself an adequate and able substitute.

On the day in question, Captain Beatson had looked in upon his friends shortly after breakfast to propose that they should drive with him to Worcester, dine and spend the day there, and return home in time for tea.

A slight disinclination on the Major's part, followed by his suggestion that, as early dinner had already been ordered, and their landlady disliked sudden and unexpected alterations in her lodgers' plans, the excursion should be postponed until the next day, led to the Captain good-humouredly yielding the point. Days and seasons were alike to him. The drive was therefore arranged for with due consideration of the landlady's temper and the Major's well-known character for punctuality; and then, learning that the two men were making an engagement to ride together in the afternoon, Mrs. Maxwell begged the Captain to return with her husband to tea, assuring him, however, as she did so, that she would not promise to wait, nor yet to give it him hot, after more than half-an-hour's grace.

The Major had seconded the invitation, and Captain Beatson, thus delicately reminded of his besetting sin, had gone off, laughingly protesting that nothing save a broken neck would prevent him from taking his place at the tea-table at the hour fixed, namely, half-past five.

The early afternoon saw the two friends start. The Captain, anew reiterating his determination of winning the approval of his hostess, agreed to *allow the* Major to dictate the right moment for

turning their horses' heads and spurring homewards; and, in the best of faith and the lightest of humours, waved his farewell to the two ladies, who, a trifle more incredulous than was flattering to his protestations, stood smilingly watching as he swung himself into the saddle, and, side by side with the graver, more taciturn Major, set forth at a brisk canter along the luxuriously shaded, well-kept road.

But as we have learned from Marjory's lips, they had not returned.

The extra half-hour's grace, so liberally extended by Mrs. Maxwell, passed. Tea was brought in; and mother and daughter, accustomed to the sudden caprices which governed the Captain's erratic disposition, discussed the probabilities of the absentees' movements and the fragility of their friend's promises.

And the evening passed; the tea things were removed, and supper laid to greet the wanderers who tarried so unconscionably.

"Not back yet, mother! something must have happened to them!" was Marjory's exclamation on her return from a short walk, as she peeped into the room, fully expecting to find the truants loudly apologetic and chivalrously repentant. But upon seeing her mother still the sole occupant of the room, the tone of anxiety in which the words were uttered testified to the disappointment she experienced.

"Surely not, child! and perhaps after all they have gone on to Worcester."

"Even if they had, mother, they've had loads of time, and should have been here long ere now; it's not so far."

"True, dear! but when once they got their horses put up, they would find so much to see that they would forget. They would take tea, too, and talk, and dawdle. Captain Beatson has no regard for ——"

Marjory never knew what it was that the Captain had no regard for.

A hasty step was heard running upstairs, followed by a slower, more hesitating one. A cautious whisper preceded a knock at the door; and, arrested by the sounds, Mrs. Maxwell, aroused into a dread of forthcoming evil, rose to her feet, and, with a face brimful of fear and white as the table-cloth upon which her hand rested, stood awaiting the entrance of the bearer of the evil tidings she felt were on the wing to her.

A second later Captain Beatson entered the room. But before the words he had schooled himself to utter could be spoken, Marjory was by his side, breathlessly demanding to know the worst, and commanding him to tell her what had befallen her father.

But the Captain did not at once obey. Putting the girl gently but firmly aside, and whispering a word in her ear, he advanced to the table at which Mrs. Maxwell stood rooted to the spot; and, leading her to a couch, seated himself by her side, whilst, in a voice he did his best to control, he said—

"The Major has met with a slight accident, or we should have been here hours ago, Mrs. Maxwell! I've seen him comfortably housed and attended to —everything done for him, in fact, that should be done—ere coming on to warn you that he cannot be home to-night. I left him falling into a quiet sleep, and in the hands of a clever young doctor, who desired me to tell you that he is going on well, and that he will have him moved as soon as practicable."

"We shall go to him at once! But you are concealing something. What was the accident, and where is he lying? Tell us quickly!" gasped Mrs. Maxwell, whilst Marjory, kneeling down by the Captain's side, kept an anxious watch upon every movement of the grieved, kindly face, and tried to penetrate the truth she felt was being withheld from her.

"He's been thrown from his horse; bruised, of course, by it and badly shaken, but nothing serious. We might have got him home, but the poor fellow was lying so peacefully still that the doctor grudged to have him disturbed. You'll find that he's been well cared for, Mrs. Maxwell, and that we've done the best we could for him. I've got a carriage at the door, and will take you and Miss Marjory to him. But mind, there's no danger, and no need for these anxious faces. There might have been had the vile animal's lumbering carcase landed on the top of him, but instead of that he just eased himself of his rider and continued his gallop."

"And did father send you to tell us, Captain Beatson? Was he able to do that?" asked Marjory, wistfully.

"Of course, my dear—he and the doctor," rejoined the Captain, carefully scanning the pale, agitated faces of the wife and daughter of the friend about whom he felt more anxious than he would confess.

"Ah, we must go to him at once! There must be no delay—not a moment, Captain!" quickly responded Mrs. Maxwell as, starting to her feet, she hastily left the room to don her bonnet and mantle, and urged Marjory to follow her without delay.

But in the single moment Miss Maxwell lingered alone with the Captain, she betrayed to him how, all unwittingly, and with the best intentions in the world, he had unwarily aroused her mother's suspicions as to the gravity of her father's condition.

"He is far worse than you wish us to believe! He is dying! I know it, and mother too! You did not mean it, but you have as good as said it yourself, Captain!" she cried, with her tear-stained face lifted to his, and her eyes pleadingly fixed upon her friend's, to read the effect of her words upon him.

"Bless my soul, my dear, I never said a word to lead you to that conclusion! You have misunderstood me entirely! I 'm a clumsy enough fellow, but I never said that, Miss Marjory! The Major was free from pain and lying peaceful as an infant

when I left him. No, no, my dear! he 's going on well, and we 'll soon have him on the road again,' rejoined the Captain, anxiously wondering where he had blundered, and how the girl could have so misinterpreted his words.

"You have said it again! Oh, Captain, why will you try to deceive me? Tell me quickly before my mother comes back! Is there any hope at all?"

"My dear child, there 's every hope! I would not willingly deceive you."

"Forgive me! you don't understand. But mother and I know so well that father's lying peacefully still, and quiet as an infant, is the worst symptom he could have. Were he not a great deal worse than you think, he would be fractious and ever in movement. He would not lie still in a stranger's house, and his own so near, were he only slightly injured as you represent. That is why mother got up at once to go, after you told her the doctor grudged to disturb him," explained Marjory, her voice thick with the sobs she felt rising in her throat, as she ran away to make preparations for going to the father she believed to be dying.

"Bless my soul, I 'm the clumsiest fellow at a thing of the kind I ever knew! But the poor lassie may be wrong, and while there 's life there 's hope," muttered Captain Beatson, as he slowly paced the room, filled with ruth for the girl to whose sweet pensive face he had brought an additional sadness and a sorrow which, he began to

fear, would not be lessened by the journey upon which she was going.

* * * * *

Captain Beatson had considerably softened down the nature of the accident.

The simple facts were that in coming home the horse ridden by the Major had taken fright and bolted. From the firm, well-balanced seat, and the tight hold he maintained of the bridle, the Captain fully expected his friend to regain control of the animal; but to his consternation he saw him dash wildly onwards, and a second or two later the Major was off the saddle with one foot still in the stirrup, and being dragged helplessly along the road.

A few yards more and the horse's progress was stayed, the bridle was seized, and the Major was rescued from his perilous position.

Sorely shaken, badly bruised, and unconscious, he was carried to the nearest dwelling, where kind, willing hands tended him, until the promptly-summoned doctor should decide whether or not he could be taken home.

Such was the unfortunate accident which Captain Beatson, with the kindliest intentions, did his best to impress upon Mrs. Maxwell would be attended by no serious consequences to her husband.

In doing so, however, he had exceeded Dr. Morton's instructions. Nor had he thought it necessary to explain that the still, painless condition in which he had left his friend was due to the *state of* unconsciousness, from which the doctor had

failed to arouse his patient, over whom he was keeping a grave and careful watch, whilst the Captain hastened to break the news of the disaster to the wife and daughter he was instructed to bring back with him without delay.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### CONVALESCENCE.

FOR a couple of weeks the doctors in attendance upon the Major held out but slight hopes of his recovery. Life seemed hanging in the balance, and upon so slender a thread that they declined to raise expectations which, they considered, would in all probability prove deceptive.

Mrs. Maxwell had taken rooms in the house to which the Major had been carried, for it had been judged unwise to have him moved; and both she and Marjory accepted the critically anxious glances exchanged between the doctors and the nurse as proofs of the grave, nigh hopeless condition of the husband and father, whose worst symptom, they kept reiterating to each other, was the absence of the old irritability which had always been a marked accompaniment of his every illness, and the unfailing forerunner of recovery.

Captain Beatson alone refused to believe that the Major would succumb.

His frequent visits and cheering words were

Marjory's chief solace during the days of dread that ensued. And as her hopes and fears vibrated restlessly between her mother's settled conviction that recovery was impossible, and the Captain's decided affirmation that it was not only possible but certain, she began to find herself agreeing with the dictum so frequently impressed upon her by her friend that 'while life lasts, hope need not die.'

And when the days had slowly lapsed into a couple of weeks, the doctors gave their verdict. The crisis was past. The Major's recovery was no longer doubtful, it was assured.

After that Marjory was compelled to promise that she would have faith for ever more in Captain Beatson's wisdom. She did not guess what a great weight of anxiety had been lifted off his mind, for he had never admitted it; and having kept his fears cabined and confined in the recesses of his own heart for fifteen days, he hastened to rid himself of their irksome company, and banished them all by solemnly declaring that he had the gift of second sight, which had shown him the Major sturdily setting forth to St. Anne's Well for his morning draught; and that, of course, he had to live and get strong as quickly as possible to make the vision a reality.

And Marjory's sweet face brightened, and a long absent smile played upon her lips, and Captain Beatson went away feeling amply repaid by these first signs of returning hopefulness, but with a vague yearning dissatisfaction in his heart that he had come into the world so long before the

pensive-eyed girl who watched him go. And to this succeeded a questioning curiosity as to what the Major and Mrs. Maxwell would say if——

But the train of reflective thought was not pursued.

The little 'if' was too brimful of possibilities. The Captain paused, gave one long, shrill whistle, as if to summon the common-sense, which had deserted him, back to his aid, and, resolutely wending homewards, severely took himself to task for his folly.

But the folly was repeated on the morrow, and the next to that, and still the next again.

The little 'if' would not be banished; it pursued and haunted him, ever bringing prominently to view a pair of wistful blue eyes, and a sweet, pensive face, which he recognised to be those of Marjory Maxwell.

* * * * *

The Major's recovery was, however, a tardy one. August was in its prime when the accident happened; September was waning ere he was allowed to leave his room. To his daughter's satisfaction convalescence had brought back some of the old exacting little irritable ways she had come to regard as an inalienable feature of her father's bodily well-being. And now that the invalid had in a measure reverted to them, she was laughingly telling him how she had disliked his amiability and meekness, how she had missed the quick, hasty, imperious tone she had been accustomed to from babyhood, and how ill the

milder virtues had sat upon him. It was half jest, half earnest; but to hear his failings thus humorously commented upon pleased their owner not a little.

It was the second day of emancipation from the sick-room, and Mrs. Maxwell had gone out to get a breath of the sweet, balmy air, of which she had had but little for many weeks; and Marjory had been left in charge of the invalid. Bearing many traces of the illness through which he had passed, the Major lay upon a couch drawn close to the window, whilst Marjory sat by his feet jokingly telling him how she had welcomed the first cross word he had uttered from his sick bed.

It was a strange confession to make, yet it was true. And the girl laughed as she remembered how she had hailed it as the sure and trusty harbinger of returning health.

"What an amiable picture you draw of me!" smiled the Major, as he fixed a searching, critical glance upon the sweet face by his side.

"Well! but it's a true one, father; and I verily believe that you won't feel quite well until you hurl a good round of grape shot at my poor head, or at some other body's!"

"It won't be at yours, Marjory! depend upon that," answered her father, quickly.

"You can't imagine how I missed your fits of indignation, dad, or you would not deprive me of them," softly laughed Marjory, as she turned to see how the invalid was relishing her plain-spoken accusation.

A faint smile rose to the Major's lips, but he did not reply; and the girl lapsed into silence. Whilst it lasted the old wistful sadness o'erspread her countenance, and a yearning far-away look crept into her liquid blue eyes.

The Major lay watching the transformation; and a sigh escaped him as he realised how forced and artificial must be the mirth which could so quickly give place to a gravity such as he saw settling down upon the young, fair face so lately wreathed in smiles.

Marjory's sad face recalled another to his remembrance—that of the minister of Staneridge. Had Time dealt more kindly with him than with the girl? Had Memory's dimming process effaced *her* image from *his* heart? If not, was it too late to bring love to the child who had shown such marked devotion to the father who had brought upon her the crowning misery of a woman's life?

These were questions which for weeks past had brooded in the Major's mind.

Watching Marjory flit to and fro about his sick bed, he had deliberated upon the barrier raised between her and happiness. He had noted how ineffectual were the remedies of change and travel to banish sadness from her heart. And, as he lay watching her sit by his couch that soft September evening, these unanswered questions again obtruded themselves upon him; and, loudly reminding him that life is short, that beyond the grave there is no redress for the wrongs of time, they entreated him to give them his attention ere it was too late.

Nor did they plead in vain.

That night, as Marjory slept, a letter was winging its flight to the Manse of Staneridge. A badly enough written epistle it was, for the hand that penned it was feeble and weak. But the heart that indited it was softened and humbled; it had been tried, and had come forth from the furnace chastened and purified.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A CONFESSION.

IT was a Thursday evening when Major Maxwell despatched his letter to the Rev. Thomas Oxlade. Monday morning saw him in receipt of an answer to it, and Tuesday afternoon found him closeted with the young minister in the bright, sunny room which opened off his bedroom.

Mrs. Maxwell had gone out with Marjory immediately after the early dinner. The pretext was that she had some shopping to do, some medicine to get for the Major, and various little bills to settle. In reality she wished the girl to be away from the house, and out of sight and hearing of the Rev. Thomas, until the interview with her father was over.

The two men were alone. The elder lay upon his couch; the younger was seated by its head, listening intently and silently to what was being told him in a low, strangely altered voice from that which had characterised the speaker's last conversation with him.

There was no empty exchange of polite plati-

tudes upon this occasion. The Major plunged at once into the matter he had in hand and at heart. And as he did so it needed all the listener's tact and wisdom to respect the sick man's wishes that he should not be interrupted.

"I deceived you, Oxlade! I dealt harshly with you! My sins have come home to roost, and I have sent for you that you may hear how I wronged my child. The day we parted I told you there was insanity in my wife's family, and that my girl must never marry. I reasoned with you, pleaded with you to save your unborn children the woful heritage *my* child would transmit to them. And you believed me! you did what no man situated as you were could have refused to do—you left her to forget."

"God forgive me if my conduct has brought the evil upon her!" cried the young man, impulsively.

"Do not interrupt me! Marjory is well, quite well. And, listen! it was a lie I told you—a lie blended with truth," continued the Major.

"You showed me the proofs——"

"I told you my wife had been confined in an asylum, and that her father had died in one! I spoke of my boy; I showed you sufficient to prove that I was not deceiving you. The doctor's letters and receipts which I gave you were all genuine. My father-in-law died a raving maniac! My wife was frequently under control. My boy was also subject to mental derangement. All that I told you. It was the solemn truth. And yet I deceived you, grossly imposed on you!"

The Major paused, but the Rev. Thomas did not speak, and, after a breathing space, the low troubled voice once more resumed.

"In presenting you with these I kept back one proof of the truth of my statements. *That* I am now going to show you. It will tell you that my wife was not only in an asylum, *but that she died in it!*"

"Good Heavens! you have been twice married then!" exclaimed the young man, starting to his feet, forgetful of everything save what the fact boded for him.

"Sit down! I have more to tell," said the Major in a low tone, as he went on without a pause.

"Yes! I have been twice married; Marjory is the child of my second wife. My boy was only her step-brother, but she does not know it."

"She does not know that you, her father, have been twice married!" exclaimed the Rev. Thomas incredulously.

"She does not! listen! I married my first wife after but a short acquaintance. I knew nothing of her family. I was madly in love with her, and rested satisfied with the fact that my love was returned. My boy was born. Three months later my wife was taken to an asylum. Inquiries showed that she belonged to a family inheriting a strong bias to insanity, that her father was not dead as I had been led to believe, but an inmate of a mad-house. From the day I discovered that, I hated the woman to whom I was tied—the woman who had lied to me, and who had bequeathed so woful

a heritage to my child." The Major spoke with strong emotion. He stopped, and there was a short interval of silence, which Tom Oxlade had not broken when the narrative was resumed.

"Some months later the tie was severed by death, and I welcomed the deliverance. I married my present wife shortly afterwards. I told her how I had been deceived, and how I wished my boy to grow up believing her to be his mother. She agreed that it was best. And from that day I never mentioned my first wife's name. She became more than dead to me—I tried to believe that she had never been. But there were times when the sight of her child, the poor lad you saw at Earlsgrange, was too much for me—there were days when I almost hated him."

"Poor lad! And he never knew! It says much for Mrs. Maxwell's kindness," softly replied Tom as the Major, pausing, poured out a glass of wine from the decanter, standing ready for his use upon the small table by his side.

Invigorated by the draught, he continued—

"She loved the boy, and he never knew until a short time before his death. It was partly his fault, partly mine. The doctors had advised me that he was unfit to qualify for the profession he had chosen, and I meant to keep him at Earlsgrange for the winter and watch over him. He began to fret at the interruption to his studies, to question me as to when they were to be resumed, and I either told him or hinted to him that I did not mean him to continue them at all. One thing led

on to another. He dived into the question of heredity, demanded to know if his illness, as he called it, was due to an inherited bias, and, if so, was that my reason for putting a stop to his studies."

"I parried his inquiries as well as I could, until, suddenly raising my eyes, I saw the mother so strongly reflected in the son's image and bearing that I became maddened with rage. I threw the truth at his head and cursed him to his face."

Shocked and stunned by the confession, Tom remained silent, whilst the Major, recovering his composure after a pause, continued slowly—

"I was never a man of half measures, Oxlade! I sent for you to hear the truth, and I do not disguise it. The boy was wounded to the quick, yet, innocently enough, he brought more wrath down upon his head by linking my child's name with his own. He roused me anew by his forebodings regarding Marjory. She too must be liable to attacks such as his own, he reasoned, logically enough you perceive, seeing he was unaware that, being but his step-sister, she was unbridled by fate and no sharer in the tainted heritage handed on to him by the woman—his unknown mother—who had wronged me so vilely. Ere we parted I put convincing proof in his hand that he, and he alone, inherited the curse. Knowing part I judged it well to let him know the whole. I gave him a letter I had prepared a few years after my girl's birth, *when* suffering from protracted, dangerous illness. *It contained* the story of my marriage with his

mother, and of her own and her father's deaths. My reason for writing it was that, should symptoms of insanity develop and render confinement necessary after my death, he should learn, upon recovery or release, from whom he inherited the disease, and also that his sister was exempt from it. He was but a child when I laid it away in my desk, and in all probability, had he not maddened me with his persistency and his likeness to his mother, it would have been lying there still. You see I cared not to thrust the task of telling the lad the bitter story about his mother upon my wife, should circumstances and Marjory's welfare render it necessary. And I would not let him harbour a thought that the Maxwells were responsible for the tainted blood flowing in his veins."

"It must have been a terrible blow to him, poor lad," said Tom, almost under his breath.

"I dealt harshly with him! I own it, Oxlade!"

"And as a child he kept strong? You say that was his first and only attack?" asked Tom, his heart throbbing with pity for the lad's misery.

"Yes! his first and his last. Mrs. Maxwell always hoped he would escape, he was so strong and healthy a child; and, woman-like, she loved him for his beauty. He was beautiful to all but to me, who knew from whom the beauty came; and, as I've told you, there were days when I dreaded to look upon him, on account of his mother's beauty beaming upon his innocent baby face."

"I saw him but once, Major, one far-away day when you stopped to speak to my father on the

roadside near Earlsgrange. He was with his sister, and I remarked at the time what a handsome young fellow he was, though graver than she by a good bit," answered Tom, his thoughts bounding backwards to the sweet flash of recognition he had caught from Marjory, as, walking on with her brother, she left her father behind.

"Ay! he had waxed grave by that time; and Marjory never had his good looks," responded the Major, quietly.

The Rev. Thomas did not reply, and a faint smile rose to his lips as he waited to hear what more the Major had to tell.

He had not long to wait. Taking a paper from a bundle lying beside him, Major Maxwell put it into his visitor's hand, remarking as he did so—

"You may probably think that a man who deceived you once may do so again, and you would be justified in thinking so. This will show you, however, that my first wife died as I have told you. I would not ask you to believe it without advancing proof. Read for yourself!"

"I take your word for it, Major! so far as I am concerned no proof is necessary."

"I choose that you should have it," insisted the Major, resuming a little of his old authoritative manner.

Thus urged, the young man carefully read over the short letter which had, so many years ago, informed the Major that the tie which bound him to his hapless wife was broken. And when he had

finished it, he returned it to its owner without a comment.

"That is what I withheld from your inspection the day I showed you these others," was the remark of the elder man, as he replaced it in the small bundle he held in his hand.

"You have told me your tale, Major, and a sadder one I never heard. It shows me what an obnoxious suitor I must have been in your eyes, ere you could stoop to tell me what you did at your club; ere, too, you could impute to your child the tainted heritage from which she is as free as myself. Had I been other than the humble farmer's son, and endowed with the wealth you once told me you coveted for your daughter, would you thus have disclosed the past chapters of your life, or would they have remained buried and forgotten?" inquired the Rev. Thomas Oxlade bitterly, as he fixed a piercing glance upon the invalid's face.

"It was to be rid of you that I imputed the fatal curse, inherited by her brother alone, to my pure, innocent girl. Rather than see her your wife, I humbled myself to impress upon you that her blood was tainted, and that she could not fail to hand down a woful heritage of misery to her unborn children. You have guessed aright. To another, better-born, richer suitor, I would not have unearthed the long hidden past. I would have welcomed him as my son-in-law," replied the Major, meeting the young man's gaze unshrinkingly.

A moment later, and the Rev. Thomas said

slowly: "In sending for me you gave me no clue to what you required of me. I have listened to your story. I have heard the wrong you inflicted upon your daughter. May I now ask if that other, the better-born, richer suitor you hoped to make your son, has supplanted me in her heart?"

"Nay! that is what you must find out for yourself, Oxlade! I can only tell you that, if you have got a supplanter, he has not yet asked me for my daughter's hand," was the Major's slowly-spoken rejoinder, as his face lightened into a faint smile.

"Then will you let me repeat my offer? Will you give her to me, Major? Will you forget my humble birth, and regard me only as the man who loves your daughter, the man who will strive day and night to make her the happiest woman upon earth?"

"Having failed to bend Marjory to my will, Oxlade, I'm disposed to let her have her own way, whatever that may be. She's as dour almost as her father, and that's saying a good deal."

A beautiful smile played upon the young man's face. He rose to his feet and, bending over the invalid's couch, said in a voice from which all trace of bitterness was effaced—

"Then, Major, you will let Marjory decide her own fate? If she is willing to have me, you will not be against us, you will give her to me?"

"I have deeply sinned against both my children; for one only is it permitted me to undo the evil wrought by my pride. As her happiness is my

chief anxiety, so her wishes will prompt and guide my line of conduct, Oxlade."

"God bless you for saying that, Major!" fervently answered the Rev. Thomas, in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"Nay! say rather, 'God forgive the hardened sinner who banished the sunshine from his child's face!' If you can bring it back, Mr. Thomas, you 'll have her father's blessing!" quickly rejoined the Major.

"I 'll bring it back! But when am I to see Marjory?—she knows I 'm here?"

"She does not! Her mother took her out to escape you, and you must not try to see her until to-morrow. She has yet to learn why you left her. You forget that she 's in ignorance of all I 've told you."

"One word more, Major! Keep the past hidden from Marjory. It is a painful chapter, affecting only the dead wife she knew nothing of, and the dead lad she loved so faithfully, mourned over so deeply. To learn it so late would do no good, and could but grieve her afresh," urged Tom, full of anxiety to spare Marjory the knowledge of her father's sin.

"The child believes you deserted her! She attaches no blame to me at all, Mr. Thomas! Remember she will demand an explanation of your conduct, and she is entitled to it!"

"And she can have it, Major! Tell her some of the truth, reserve the rest of it," answered the Rev. Thomas, smiling.

"Deception again, young man! Well, what would you?"

"Tell Marjory that you regarded me as so far beneath her that you goaded me into accepting the barrier raised by yourself — namely, inequality of birth, position, and status. Keep back everything else, I beseech you, Major, as you value your child's peace of mind. If you want to see her sweet face radiant and happy, let her brother's sad, weird story of suffering and wrong remain untold. She needs to hear no more of sorrow, Major! Her cup has already been overflowing."

"I 'll think over what you say, young man, but I 'll make no rash promises! Meanwhile, go back to your hotel, and, if your love be not cooled by to-morrow at noon, come and see what Marjory has to say to you. You 'll not find the old man your enemy this time," rejoined the Major, beginning to show signs of weariness, and eager that his visitor should be gone ere his wife and daughter's return.

"You think it must be to-morrow, then, Major?" inquired the Rev. Thomas, wistfully.

"Undoubtedly, or the day after, if you prefer it!"

"Nay! my patience would not brook that, sir! You don't know how my love——"

"Come, come, Mr. Thomas! I 'll hear about that after you have seen Marjory; until then I 'll try to *imagine* how you feel. I 'm an inhospitable fellow to send you away just at our own tea-hour, to be

sure, but Mrs. Maxwell would never forgive me if she came back and found you here. It would be too sudden a surprise for Marjory, too; so there's nothing for it but to go back to your hotel and refresh your inner man, and then philosophically sally forth to view Malvern at eventide," responded the Major, smilingly, giving his hand and bidding the young minister 'good-bye.'

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE MAJOR AND HIS DAUGHTER.

"HE still loves the child, and he is coming to tell her so to-morrow," was the Major's rejoinder to his wife's whispered inquiry half-an-hour later, when she returned and hastily questioned him as to the result of his conversation with the Rev. Thomas Oxlade.

It was all the information he had time to give; for presently Marjory appeared in the room and began to explain to him how the many little errands they had to execute had detained them longer than they had expected and caused them to be late.

"But you won't scold us, seeing that we've come back penitent—will you, fatherkin?" she concluded, as, arranging the little table by his side, she waited to hand the cup of tea her mother was preparing for him.

A slight shake of the head and a smile were the only replies the Major vouchsafed to his daughter's query. The meal proceeded almost in silence;

and when the table was cleared and Marjory had opportunely retired from the room, Mrs. Maxwell heard more fully what had taken place between her husband and his visitor.

On the same evening as that on which he had summoned the Rev. Thomas to his side, Major Maxwell had confessed to his wife the treacherous part he had played, and the odious barrier he had induced the young man to believe existed between their child and marriage. The confession had wounded Mrs. Maxwell to the quick; but, wroth as she was, she had declared her readiness to forgive the foul imputation he had so ruthlessly cast upon her and her antecedents, if only it was found that repentance had not come too late to undo the evil wrought by his desire to win wealth and position for the girl who had unhesitatingly plighted her troth to the Denetap farmer's son, and rested content in her choice.

When, therefore, some time later she went in search of her daughter, it seemed as if, in the prospect of her child's restored happiness, all trace of her husband's guilt had been banished from her mind.

With a bright, exultant smile upon her countenance, she noiselessly entered the room, and, quietly stepping behind Marjory's chair, twined her arms round her, as she stooped to kiss the sweet, grave face which turned to greet her.

"Your father has sent for you, darling! He has something to tell you," she softly whispered in her ear.

"To tell me! What is it, mother? Do you know?" asked Marjory, lightly toying with her mother's rings, and twirling them childishly round the delicate fingers she held within her own.

"Yes, love! but come and hear what it is from your father," slowly rejoined Mrs. Maxwell, giving her a kiss as she spoke.

"Why, mother, how nice you are looking!—not a bit fagged or worn out by your walk, I declare!" exclaimed Marjory, rising from her seat and, for the first time, fixing her gaze upon her mother's radiant, happy face.

"I have quite recovered, dear! Your father and I have had a long talk, and the good news he gave me has quite dispelled my fatigue. Did you ever hear that a merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance, I wonder, Marjory?" responded Mrs. Maxwell, smiling.

"I think I have, once upon a time, very long ago! But tell me, mother, what has happened to make you look so happy?" asked the girl, her curiosity excited by her mother's words.

"Your father has had a visitor, dearie! But come and hear all about it from his own lips," urged Mrs. Maxwell gently, as she twined her daughter's arm within her own, and, leading her into the Major's room, quietly slipped away before the girl realised she was gone.

"Well, father, what has happened? Mother wouldn't tell me anything save that you had a visitor—some friend of Captain Beatson's, I suppose, eager to see you on the wing again," said

Marjory, seating herself by the invalid's couch, and forcing a smile to her lips.

"No! It was a man I once deeply wronged, Marjory," answered the Major. "Yes! The look I brought to that man's face has haunted me for weeks past, and I sent for him to confess the evil I had done him, to see if it were possible for me to undo it," he continued, in a subdued tone.

"And is it, father?" asked Marjory, feelingly.

"It is! He has been with me the whole afternoon, and, ere he left, I won his forgiveness."

"I think you have got into the habit of magnifying trifles lately. How did you wrong him? Not very deeply, I am sure, father."

"I lied to him. One day he came to consult me about something of vital interest to himself and another. The morning saw him armed with all the elasticity and buoyancy of early manhood; a couple of hours later he was a man anguished and heart-riven, bowed to the ground and staggering under the blow my false words had dealt him."

"Poor father, how dreadful!"

"Marjory, my words were lies! Think you I did right to send for the man whose ghastly face rose up to condemn me on what might well have proved my death-bed? Was it right or wrong, child?"

"You did right, father, quite right!"

"His forgiveness has eased my mind, Marjory! I am glad you approve of what I did."

"Yes! And now that it's all over, forget it, father," said Marjory, wondering not a little at the

unusual confidence the Major was placing in her by revealing this bygone incident of his life.

"By-and-by. But shall I tell you how I wronged this man? Would you like to hear?"

"Yes, if the telling of it won't hurt you, father."

"It won't hurt me! Listen! The man was younger than I, and considerably under my influence at the period I speak of. He took me into his confidence regarding the woman he was engaged to marry—a woman we both knew, both loved, though in different ways; and, Marjory, I did not let him leave my presence until I had convinced him that marriage with her was impossible!"

"But why, father?"

"He was beneath her in station—and——"

"That was nothing, father, a mere nothing," ejaculated Marjory, interrupting the Major's explanations.

"It is a great deal to some folks, child! But that was not all. I lied to the man! I told him there was an inseparable barrier existing against his marriage with the woman he loved. He doubted it, and I produced proofs which he could not gainsay. Proofs which were realities regarding another person totally unconnected, I brought to bear upon him, and before these he succumbed. His marriage was broken off, and two people were rendered miserable through the lies your father told. Do you wonder now that I was haunted by the misery I saw depicted on the man's face? That I had to bring him here to make a clean breast of how I had lied to him?"

"It was cruel, father, very cruel! But he forgave you?"

"Yes, child!"

"And is it too late? Is the woman living, father?"

"Yes!"

"And she has been true to him? She never married—did she?"

"She never married, nor he either," replied the Major, without lifting his eyes to those he felt were fixed upon his face.

"Then why not let them marry now? Have they grown too old to care about it, father?"

"I don't know! I did not ask him."

"I should have asked him, father!"

"You forget that the lady may not care for him now. Time often changes folks, Marjory!"

"If she loved him, Time will not have changed her. Does *he* still love her, father?"

"Yes, passionately!"

"Why, then, he will seek her out and marry her! Then all the wrong you did them will be forgotten; so don't grieve over it any more, father! It will all come right," said Marjory, in a most reassuring tone of voice.

"I should like to believe so, child, for I wronged them deeply!"

"It 's a very sad story—but you 've not told me who your friend is, father!"

The Major paused ere replying. Then fixing his eyes upon his daughter's face he slowly answered: "My friend is your friend also, child! The story

to which you have been listening is his and yours. Can you guess now who my visitor was?"

"Father! Father!"

"Yes! It was I who banished your lover from your side. It was him I saw staggering under the blow I dealt. It was my lies, your father's lies, your father's pride, that came between you and Thomas Oxlade. But he has forgiven me, Marjory! And seeing *he* has done that, will the girl he loves be pitiful also and forgive her father?" entreated the Major, as, taking his daughter's hand, he raised it to his lips.

There was a long silence ere Marjory spoke; and then, kneeling by her father's couch and lifting her tear-stained face to his, she gently whispered some sweetly-soothing words of forgiveness, ere quietly gliding from the room.

A few minutes later Mrs. Maxwell was holding her sobbing child in her arms. The floodgates of her heart were opened, and she wept unchecked on her mother's breast.

But, by-and-by, slowly and gradually the grief was calmed, the tears were wiped away, the Major and his treachery were forgotten, and, ere Marjory sought her pillow that night, some faint reflection of the joy that filled her heart was visible in the sparkle of her love-lit eyes, which augured not ill for the future happiness of the minister of Staneridge.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### MARJORY AND TOM.

IT is a week later.

Eight days have passed since the minister of Staneridge informed his housekeeper that business of importance was taking him to England, and that, in all probability, he would be home on the following Thursday. On hastily obeying Major Maxwell's summons to Malvern, the Rev. Thomas Oxlade had quite expected to preach in his own church on the next Sunday. His annual holiday was just over, and he was too diligent, too conscientious a shepherd to absent himself again so soon from the flock, who, he well knew, were never better pleased than when he was filling his own pulpit.

The considerate intentions of the minister for the welfare and contentment of his parishioners were not, however, carried out.

Mrs. Clayson did not see her master home on Thursday, nor did the congregation see their pastor in the pulpit on Sunday. The former confessed she was unable to say definitely when he would

return; and the latter, grumbling a little at the studiously prepared but inferior fare provided for them by the young preacher commissioned by Mr. Oxlade to act as his substitute, meekly hoped he would return benefited by the extra holiday he seemed to be taking, and inwardly trusted that the incomprehensible delay in resuming duty betokened no dissatisfaction with his present charge, and that it was not the forerunner of coming changes.

So often had Staneridge seen the promising young clergyman, whom she delighted to idolise, leave her for another wealthier and more influential charge, that she had grown somewhat suspicious; and had even, it must be feared, become a little lacking in that charity which thinketh no evil regarding those breakers of the Tenth Commandment, who first coveted, and then tempted, her minister to desert her. It was a weakness against which she did not much struggle. Past events in her history had rendered her jealous of her rights; and not the least important of these, she considered, was her proprietorship in the pulpit eloquence of the pastor whom, having wooed and won in his chrysalis form of unknown, budding probationership, she found it grievously hard to part with when transfigured by time and experience into the beloved friend and adviser of a few years' growth.

The eighth day of her master's absence at last brought to Mrs. Clayson an intimation of his early return. He intended to be back on the following Thursday; and this item of news being imparted

to one or two of her neighbours, speedily spread, and tended to relieve the well-meant, if somewhat needless, anxiety the flock were experiencing on their shepherd's account.

But Staneridge did not know how the Rev. Thomas was engaged, or she would not, perhaps, have grumbled at his absence.

These eight days have wrought a wondrous change upon his face and bearing; and more than once has he been heard boasting that they have made him the happiest of men. But the Major's story of treachery and guilt has not been suffered to intrude itself into the newly-found joy of the present; and Marjory has been left in ignorance of all her lover judged it well to conceal from her. For her fate, being left entirely in her own hands, was decided with modest, timid promptitude, and shy, trustful confidence in the wooer who, she felt, had loved her all the time, in spite of any amount of chilling perplexities and phantom barriers.

Assured by the Rev. Thomas that he aimed at becoming the happiest mortal upon earth, she quickly decreed that her mission was to further his ambition; and as that demanded her constant presence and watchful care, she raised no objection to his proposal that her life's work should be begun and carried on at Staneridge Manse.

Her mission agreed upon, it but remained to fix a date for Marjory's entrance upon her new sphere. This important item of the programme was not, however, so speedily arranged as the Rev. Thomas could have wished; and its discussion was fast

revealing to him that the Major was right when he hinted that "dourness" formed by no means an insignificant ingredient of his daughter's character.

All sweetness and amiability regarding everything else, Marjory became "dourness" itself when urged to have the wedding fixed to take place as early in October as possible. She laughed her lover to scorn for suggesting that she should have it so. She had no pity for the loneliness he tried to depict to her; she declared she was content to know that her mission was awaiting her, and smilingly asked the inconsiderate Thomas if he thought she could undertake so important an office without making some small preparations for it. Staneridge, she assured him, would expect to see his bride attired in suitable raiment, and time would be necessary to muster a gown or two worthy of its inspection.

But the Rev. Thomas, failing to see the wisdom of Marjory's procrastination, and meekly retorting that every gown she had worn lately seemed lovelier than the other, and would meet Staneridge's approval, begged her to reconsider her decision and let the wedding take place within a month. Marjory was, however, relentless. She laughingly assured him that she had been steadily settling down into old-maidenhood, since last they met; and that one month, or more, would be needed to convince her that her visions of future happiness were realities, not dreams.

A month alone for that, then the trousseau would claim her attention! And with her fair

loving arms clasped tightly round the Rev. Thomas's neck, she tried her utmost to get him to don her spectacles and look at the matter from her standpoint.

And thus a week passed; Marjory remained obdurate, but the gates of Elysium stood ever open, and for eight days did the Rev. Thomas wander to-and-fro within their sacred precincts.

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It is the last morning of the lover's visit, and, as her daughter flits about the prettily-furnished sitting-room, Mrs. Maxwell watches her eagerly, admiringly. The pensive sadness has vanished, and love's rosy light which has come in its place has strangely beautified the sweet, smiling face which Mrs. Maxwell is contrasting with that wistful, sorrowful countenance the girl had exhibited so short a time before.

"A penny for your thoughts, mothery!" in Marjory's low, silvery tones, arouses Mrs. Maxwell from her reverie, and a second lafer her daughter is behind her chair, twining her arms round her neck.

"They were far from original, darling, so you won't fancy your old mother has grown conceited when she tells you what they were, will you?"

"I won't promise that, mother, for it has struck me lately that you are waxing vain and conceited, both!" retorted Miss Maxwell, lightly imprinting a kiss upon her mother's brow.

"My thoughts date back to the wise man's reign, and they are as true to-day as they were then! Hear them, Marjory, and judge for yourself!"

replied Mrs. Maxwell, rising and taking her girl's love-suffused face in her hands as she smilingly repeated: "'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine,' and its possessor, child, hath a 'continual feast.'"

"Solomon's wisdom is frequently on your lips now-a-days, mother!" replied Marjory with a smile.

"Yes! My girl's face constantly brings these words to my mind; for there is no cosmetic in the world to compare with happiness, child!" rejoined Mrs. Maxwell fervently, as the door gently opened and the Rev. Thomas Oxlade entered in time to catch her last remark.

"It's not Marjory who is addicted to the use of cosmetics, I hope," he lightly laughed, as, greeting the two ladies and seating himself, he turned his love-lit eyes upon the bright, eager face of his betrothed.

"Marjory and no other, Tom! I've just been complimenting her upon the discovery of a wonderful specific," replied Mrs. Maxwell, archly.

"And its name, young lady? Know you not that money cannot purchase such things at Staneridge?" laughed Tom, raising Marjory's hand to his lips.

"No, nor elsewhere, Tom! Its name is happiness, and 'it cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof,'" replied Mrs. Maxwell, as she rose to attend a summons to her husband's room.

"My last vision of happiness until when, Marjory? Have you relented?" whispered the

Rev. Thomas, as, left alone with his betrothed, he folded her in a long and fervent embrace, and anew reverted to the vexed question of the wedding-day.

And whether it was that Marjory was beginning to realise what months without Tom would mean for her, or whether 'dourness' was less prominent a trait in her character this morning, certain it is that she was less clamorous for delaying the ceremony than she had hitherto proved. And although she still maintained that it was impossible to be gowned and booted and gloved by the last day of October, she faintly hinted that an extra month's time might see all difficulties overcome, and suffice to make her a presentable, if not a resplendent bride.

And thus it was arranged to the infinite satisfaction of the chief parties concerned. The last day of November was to take the place of the last day of October; and, as the proposal met with Major and Mrs. Maxwell's approval, the Rev. Thomas was not allowed to return to Staneridge in uncertainty as to the date of the realisation of those dreams of happiness, which, spite of the swarthy sibyl's feeble encouragement, he had first begun to cherish one long, bygone summer day by the shores of Loch Kaltree.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

WHEN the Reverend Thomas Oxlade returned to the Manse of Staneridge, he was agreeably surprised to find his father pacing to and fro the library floor. The slack time had come round at the farm, and Mr. Oxlade, desirous of judging of his son's well-being with his own eyes, had resolved to take him unawares and pay his long-promised visit. The young minister's weary, faded appearance had haunted the old man. He could not rest satisfied with the epistles regularly despatched from the Manse, which, brimful of everything save that which he most wished to know, awoke in his heart a keen yearning for a few days of close intercourse with his son in his new home.

A single glance at Tom's cheerful face told Mr. Oxlade more eloquently than words could have done that, whatever the important business mentioned by the house-keeper might have been, it had chased the sorrow-clouds from his son's heart, and left in their place a brightness and happiness to

which his countenance had for months been a stranger. No gloom now rested on his brow; the eyes were no longer dull and lustreless; the ready, frank smile sprang up and played freely over the features, unrestrained by the former rigidity of their curves.

The two men sat long over the tea-table, and it was only on Tom's leaving it and moving towards the window that his father ventured to comment upon his revived elasticity and buoyancy of manner, as well as the return of the old, happy laugh.

"Malvern has agreed with you, Tom! You're more like your former self than I've seen you for many a day."

"Yes, father! You're right there. I've come back hale and hearty in body and in mind, willing and ready to tie Hilda's knot, too! I'm to have that honour soon, am I not?"

"Hilda goes with the old year, you know! And I'm commissioned to tryst your services for the happy day. We'll maybe have a visit of you before then, though," replied Mr. Oxlade.

"Had I not found you here, I intended coming off next week to see you all. I must fill my pulpit on Sunday; if you'll stay over that, I'll go back with you on Monday or Tuesday. Now, will my good fellowship on the road induce you to remain?"

"I'll not be in your way, Tom, if I do?"

"Certainly not," exclaimed Tom, beginning to pace backwards and forwards.

"Well, lad, I'd do much to take you back with

me; a sight of you will do Hilda good; she 's fretted much about your loneliness and dulness here."

"It 's a bargain, then! We 'll travel together on Monday morning; and, father, neither you nor Hilda need fret about me any longer. You 've been wishing for a daughter-in-law; I 've decided to give you one at last, so there will be no more loneliness in the Manse!"

"I 'm glad of it! proud and glad to hear these words," answered Mr. Oxlade, warmly clasping his son's hand as he continued, "Your wife will have a blithesome welcome from me, lad, and I tell you that even before I ask her name, you see!"

"Her name is not a strange one in your ears, father, and it has long been the sweetest one in mine! You remember Marjory Maxwell, the Major's daughter?"

"Of course! But I fancied it was all off between you and her."

"It was!"

"And it 's all right again, lad? Well, don't tell me what you would rather keep to yourself. A cloud came between you both, but the sun was behind it! Was not that about it?" softly interrupted Mr. Oxlade, as he noticed his son's hesitation.

"A cloud, and a heavy one there was, dad! It crushed me to the ground—but it seems the sun was behind it, sure enough. Remember that Marjory never wavered in her love to me, when you welcome her as your daughter," rejoined Tom, in a low, serious tone of voice.

"Ay, lad! I remember once telling you at Denetap that I jaloused a woman was the cause of your sadness; and do you know that as soon as I saw you to-night and noticed the old, happy smile upon your lips, I said to myself, 'It's a woman that's done it!' but little did I think it was Miss Maxwell?" said Mr. Oxlade, feelingly.

"I left home a sour, forlorn bachelor, dad! And I've come back as light-hearted as a boy. Marjory has been the one love of my life," gently added Tom.

"She's above you in station, mayhap! But not in worth, though you're but the Denetap farmer's son, and it's your father who says it," smilingly replied Mr. Oxlade.

"Ay! In worth and station both, dad, is she beyond me; for know you not that Marjory is a great-grand-daughter of Maxwell of Inch-Maxwell!" grandiloquently inquired the Reverend Thomas.

"I ne'er heard tell o' him, Tom! But that's no disrespect to him or to her either. The lassie's made my boy happy, and that's enough to win my blessing. I mind her well and her brother, too, poor lad."

"We'll not speak of him, father! It's strange how Loch Kaltree is mixed up with our happiest and most sorrowful moments," replied Tom, thoughtfully.

"I sometimes think there's but a thin partition between our joys and our sorrows, Tom! But you've all your life before you, and I wish that you and your wife may drink your fill of the cup of

happiness," slowly rejoined Mr. Oxlade, as Tom was called from the room by Mrs. Clayson.

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Not slow were the good folks of Staneridge in noticing the change in their minister, and many and various were the comments passed anent the sudden revival of his old buoyancy of spirits. Happiness will not hide; and the observing eyes of the wiseacres needed not the aid of a magnifying glass to discover how the additional and sorely-grudged holiday, which had so aroused their curiosity, had been fruitful of benefit to the preacher they idolised. The conclusions drawn were manifold and sometimes strange—a higher charge with a bigger stipend; a windfall from an unknown and unloved relative; a sudden attachment and approaching nuptials, were each and severally set forth as explanations sufficient to account for the renewed vigour of the young pastor, who, a few days previously, had gone forth from them a man surcharged with the seriousness of life, and who had returned rejuvenized, bearing the long-absent traces of a happiness for which they had ofttimes been fain to account.

In the fulness of time, however, the curiosity of Staneridge was appeased. The Reverend Thomas had, it was found, no intention of abandoning his flock. He had not been setting his affections on the loaves and fishes of worldly preferment, nor had he, in the slightest manner, evinced any dissatisfaction with his environment, nor yet with the *stipend* which, as far as was known, more than

sufficed for the requirements of his bachelor establishment. In fact it appeared to the kindly, yet jealous, congregation that the young pastor was exemplarily free from the ambition and cupidity which had tinged so many of his predecessors, and which had had the result of removing one after another to a more influential, though not a more appreciative, charge.

Selfish perhaps Staneridge may have been in her devotion to her young clergyman, but withal it was a selfishness having its root in warm-hearted affection, and, leaning largely to virtue's side, it tended in no small measure to promote the well-being of the Reverend Thomas.

Happiness is contagious. The announcement that the Manse was ere long to have a mistress caused a thrill of pleasurable excitement in the quiet country district, which had but a few months before sorrowfully declared that their pastor, showing such evident tokens of having been crossed in love, would, in all probability, continue the lonely bachelor and solitary student they knew. The unexpected turn events had taken, however, roused Staneridge into action, and, all unknown to the pastor, preparations were at once set on foot to give Mrs. Thomas Oxlade an enthusiastic and suitable welcome, and one, too, which it was hoped would induce the fair young bride to seek her happiness in their midst, and at the same time influence her husband long to continue his ministrations to the flock in whose hearts there ever lurked the latent fear that he would, like their idols of old, transfer

his abilities to some more aristocratic and wealthier charge.

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It was in the highest of spirits that Thomas Oxlade set forth with his father on the following Monday morning to visit Denetap. Apprised of their brother's intention, Hilda and Andrew awaited his approach with a vaguely questioning feeling as to whether the months which had elapsed since last they had seen him had mitigated or increased the gloom which had so unexpectedly overtaken him on the very threshold of his ministerial life.

A rapid glance of Hilda's keen, critical eye, as she watched her brother dismount from the dog-cart, reassured her. Tom's face was radiant with smiles and good-nature as he clasped her for a moment in his arms; and she knew more certainly than words could have told her that the old happy disposition had returned, that it had triumphed over the sorrow of the past.

It was a merry party that gathered round the table; and as the good things, so carefully prepared by Hilda, began to disappear, Mr. Oxlade broke the ice of Tom's engagement, and laughingly informed his son and daughter that there were to be two marriages instead of one in the family that year.

"Tom has stolen a march upon us all this time, Hilda! Do you know that when I arrived at the manse, I found his Reverence gone? Business of importance had called him away, I was told; and the piece of business, I learned on his return, was nothing more or less than the sealing of his troth

with Miss Maxwell. Now, wasn't that a nicely-arranged surprise for us poor stay-at-homes?"

"Happy 's the wooing that 's no lang adoing, Mr. Thomas," cried Andrew, lustily, as he clapped his brother on the shoulder, whilst Hilda, stepping round to his chair, quietly whispered in his ear, "I 'm glad, oh so glad, Tom, that it 's all come right at last."

"Why, Hilda, you 're in the secret, are you?" smiled Mr. Oxlade, as his daughter resumed her seat at the table.

"Not quite, father! But had Tom consulted me as to the sister I should like, my choice would have fallen upon Miss Maxwell."

"Hilda and I are in the same boat, you see, father, so we understand each other. Nevertheless, I condole with you on the loss of two such important individuals as her ladyship and myself," laughed Tom, as he handed his cup for a third supply of tea.

"Some folk are no blate, are they, father?" rejoined Andrew, a good-natured smile lighting up his sunburnt face.

"Your Aunt Kirsten would tell them they 're both gifted with a good opinion of themselves; and I think they 're not burdened with too humble an estimate of their worth," responded Mr. Oxlade, his eyes wandering from one bright face to another, and then resting tenderly upon that of his younger son.

A little later Hilda and Tom were both wending their way to the loch-side. It was a lovely evening

of late September, and as brother and sister lightly climbed the hilly path, the thoughts of the former reverted to the long past summer day when he had made Marjory's acquaintance. How much had happened since then! and what a tragedy had been enacted within sight of the very spot where the pretty, fair-haired girl had sat on the jutting-out portion of the dyke, dipping her feet in the treacherous waters which were by-and-by to witness the death-agony of her miserable brother! The remembrance of Karl's short, unhappy life cast a momentary gloom over the minister's exuberant spirits; but presently, Marjory's image arising before him, the sorrow and misery of the past yielded to the brighter, happier memories clustering round the girl he had met and loved within sight of the lonely homestead, to which Aunt Kirsten had carried him so many years before.

The deepening twilight was casting its shadows around as Hilda and Tom left the loch-side, and, as the stile by the plantation was again reached, the latter, jauntily swinging himself across, proposed that they should still further extend their walk to Earlsgrange.

"You remember your first visit to the old tumble-down place, and how you tried to impose on my credulity?" asked Hilda, smiling, as, leaning against the fence, she toyed with the hat which she had taken from her head and now carried in her hand.

"Is a man likely to forget his first peep into Elysium, think ye, Hilda?" rejoined Tom, the love-light kindling in his eye as he recalled Mar-

jory's loss at the loch-side, and the train of events to which it had led.

"Well, I suppose not! But let us make haste to get at it. I suspect there is not much to be seen now, for Earlsgrange has not been let since the Major left it. Old Fairbairn and his wife are still looking after things as cannily as ever."

"Always expecting the proprietor to swoop down upon them at any moment, as the old man used to threaten in days of yore," laughed Tom, briskly setting forth to revisit the house endeared to him by recollections of bygone times.

A short walk brought the brother and sister within sight of the mansion. The solitary, weather-beaten house standing forth in the dreamy calm of the fast-gathering twilight, presented a weird, romantically-interesting picture, which fascinated Tom, but which to Hilda appeared a pitiful exhibition of what the ravages of time and neglect, undeterred by the slightest attempt to retard their progress, had accomplished. After a few minutes spent in gazing at the ivy-covered dwelling, endeared to Tom by its associations with his future wife, Hilda and he turned their faces homewards.

"The glory has departed from it, and yet it could be made habitable," he remarked, casting a last lingering glance at the desolate yet picturesque mansion.

"Ichabod is written on its every stone, Tom! It's only a fit abode for the ghosts of the past now," rejoined Hilda, with a shiver, as, taking her brother's arm, she quickened her steps.

"It has a glory all its own in my eyes, Hilda—Earlsgrange and Marjory, Marjory and Earlsgrange are inseparable ideas with me. Do you understand that, little girl, I wonder?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well, here are some lines I came across the other day. Apply them to the fair Earlsgrange of the past and our vision of it to-night," said Tom, as he began to repeat slowly—

> "For time as it was cannot stay,
> Nor again as it was can it be;
> Disappearing and passing away
> Are the world, and the ages, and we."

"That's a true description of things in general as well as of stone and lime, Tom! It wouldn't be good for us, perhaps, were there no disappearing and passing away, although the process is an infinitely sad one. Isn't it?" rejoined Hilda, gravely.

"It is ——"

"And yet ——"

"It is the course of Nature, wisest and best for the world, and the ages, and us, dear," interrupted Tom, softly.

"Yes, undoubtedly! But how kindly has time dealt with you—with me, Tom. But do not let us philosophise any longer. Tell me about your Marjory. Do you think she'll be above visiting Denetap and Crumknowe?" inquired Hilda, lifting her smiling face to her brother's at the mention of her future home.

"Certainly not! Marjory is looking forward to a hearty welcome from you all. A father's pride does not always descend to his daughter; and my Marjory is as humble as yourself," answered Tom, gaily.

"Then the Major is proud? I always thought him unbearably so," remarked Hilda, interrogatively, as Laddie, catching sight of his friends opening the gate leading to the farm, bounded forward and, vigorously wagging his tail, claimed his own share of attention.

"That's right, old fellow! Come and help me to quell your mistress's curiosity. Inquisitiveness ought not to be encouraged, should it, Laddie?" laughed Tom, unwilling to discuss the Major's foibles even with his sister, and affectionately patting the faithful collie.

"Too bad to slander me to Laddie, Tom," said Hilda, smilingly, waving her hand as she hastened indoors, and left her brother to follow at his leisure.

The young minister's stay at Denetap was declared to be all too short for the number of visits that Hilda expected him to pay. The old friends at Selsdene and Fieldnest could not be neglected, nor yet could the newer prospective relatives, who, his sister declared, would never forgive him, nor her either, were he not dutifully to go through an amount of tea-drinking and cake-eating truly appalling to the clerical mind to contemplate. Naturally wishful to live at peace with his kindred, Tom chivalrously accompanied

Hilda to the various feasts prepared in his honour, and that notwithstanding his frequently pronounced opinion that he must eventually succumb a victim to the hospitality of the district.

Of the many congratulatory speeches showered upon Tom on his approaching wedding, none was more sincere than that of kindly Aunt Kirsten. The news of his engagement filled her heart with joy; nor was she ever tired of reiterating that to see the long-absent smiles restored to his fine intellectual face was a sight that did her a world of good, whilst the sound of his merry old laugh was a tonic in itself.

"It's a tonic you must come to the Manse for, Aunt! All my life long you've loaded me with good things, and it seems hard that you won't extend your kindness to paying me a visit. It's my last night, won't you crown it now with a promise to come and see me?" pleaded Tom, as he sat beside his aunt the evening before his return to Staneridge.

"Yes, I will, my dear! I'll come and give you a day's darg, as the folks hereabouts say. Before you bring home your young wife your old aunt must help to make things straight for her," rejoined Mrs. Lumsden heartily, whilst a suspicious moisture gathered in her eyes as her thoughts travelled back to the strange pathetic circumstances of her nephew's last visit, and to the poor erring mother who had so pitifully yearned for a glimpse of her child.

"I was sure you would gratify my wish to have

you for my guest; and remember, aunt, that, my bachelor days being numbered, you must put in an appearance soon. On your second visit you 'll find me a staid old Benedict," laughed Tom, delighted at the prospect of enacting the *rôle* of host to his aunt.

"I don't know about that, lad! But this I can say that you 've got a great joy in your heart which is reflected in the blithe smiles you wear upon your face, and your aunt's wish is that that joy may ever abide with you."

"That 's a capital wish, aunt, and a long speech, too, for you to make! My good fortune is causing you to wax eloquent, I see."

"Maybe, Tom! I had always a trick of just saying what was uppermost in my mind."

"Often the wisest course to follow, especially in a case of this kind," smiled Tom.

"Sometimes, perhaps, but not always! My good wishes, however, will do you no harm!"

"Ah, how they recall your friend, poor Mrs. Dawson, to my mind. Do you remember, aunt, how, with my hand clasped firmly in her own, she fervently prayed that, in blessing me, God would send me happiness—first here, and then yonder?" softly replied Tom, with a questioning far-away look in his eyes, which infinitely touched Mrs. Lumsden.

"The first part of that prayer has been answered, Tom! And so, all in good time, shall the second. I trust, though, that long years of usefulness and happiness *here* will precede the joy up yonder.

And who can tell but that she who closed her eyes on earth wishing you that, may be the first to greet you *there*," gravely responded Mrs. Lumsden, while a tear gleamed in her eye as Tom, totally unaware of all that lay behind her words, softly repeated—

"The *now* is an atom of sand,
The near is the perishing clod;
But afar is as faëry land,
And beyond is the bosom of God."

THE END.

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